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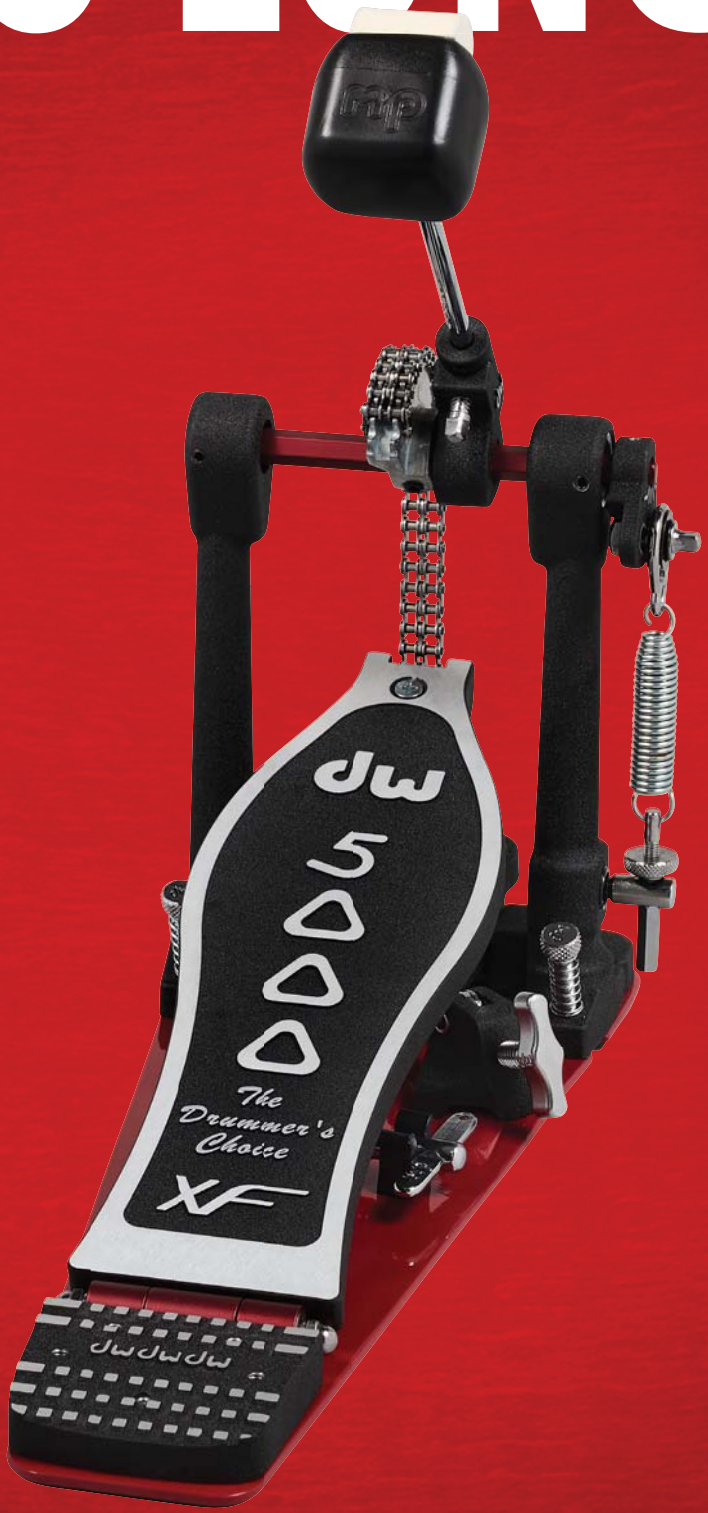

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Cover and contents photos by Chad Crawford

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Starclassic

WALNUT/BIRCH

Reimagining a New Sonic Inspiration

"Not only do they look amazing, but they are warm and have great sonic contrast".

The Pocket Queen

PREMIUM POCKET PRESENCE

The Pocket Queen herself, **Taylor Gordon**, has become a major force in music with her pocket-centric, groove-focused drumming style. She's performed with names like, *Adam Lambert*, *Beyoncé* and most recently bass legend *Richard Bona*. With an increasingly busy gigging, teaching and studio schedule, Taylor has chosen **Starclassic Walnut/Birch** as the kit to bring it all together. Like Taylor and her career, Walnut/Birch is quickly establishing a reputation as a great new option that continues to provide the same high-quality tone and innovative features drummers have come to expect from **TAMA**.

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A Common Fabric

Nir "Z" Zidkyahu, this month's featured cover artist, was born in Rishon LeZion, Israel. The session master, who's now based near Nashville—America's Music City—built a substantial career fueling a heap of contemporary hits behind the skins with artists such as John Mayer, Joss Stone, Colbie Caillat, and Jason Mraz, among many others.

Bruno Esrubilsky, this month's featured On Tour artist, is Argentine-born and grew up in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After moving to New York and building a touring career, he eventually joined the eccentric, forward-thinking badass songwriter Mitski, who was born in Japan in 1990 and would go on to establish a substantial stateside following while finishing her schooling at Purchase College in New York.

YoshimiO, drummer for the mad noise-punk group Boredoms, was born in Okayama, Japan. The other half of the group's percussive force, Yojiro Tatekawa, also hails from Japan, and both have enjoyed success touring the States and beyond with their wild Boredoms performances and volcanic presence.

Richard Spaven—whose extensive work is brilliantly analyzed this month by the author, educator, and *MD* contributor Terry Branam—grew up in the United Kingdom amidst its electronic club scene. And it was that early landscape that continues to fuel Spaven's hybrid aesthetic on his latest releases today.

Longtime *MD* columnist Aaron Edgar, of Winnipeg, Canada, presents a mind-boggling excursion into quintuplet linear patterns in this month's Rock Perspectives. Be sure to check out that lesson's accompanying video at moderndrummer.com.

We're also taking a look at the Holland–based company Kuppmen, whose carbon-fiber sticks are featured among the great new gear put under the microscope in this month's Product Close-Up.

In this issue, we're presenting an incredibly diverse group of drummers, artists, and manufacturers from all walks of life and all corners of the world—no matter where each contributor's first steps were taken. As an editor, I'm proud to say that mountains, rivers, deserts, oceans, or walls can't keep these drummers' and writers' wealth of talent, creativity, innovation, and zest for life from reaching all of us enthusiasts through our platform.

Enjoy the issue!

Willie Rose
Associate Editor

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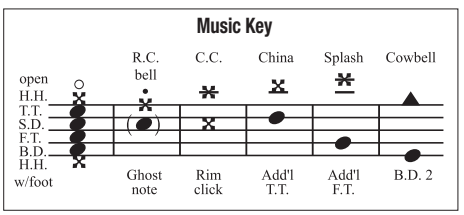

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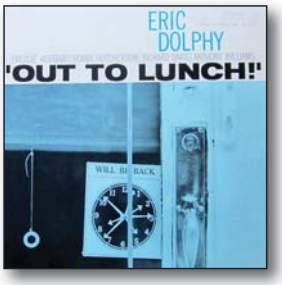
What's Your Favorite Recorded Jazz Drum Sound?



It's difficult to separate the sound from the playing. But I'll pick *Battle Cry* by Ryan Kisor with the incomparable Brian Blade on drums. It sounds like you're in the room with him. Blade's playing is so dynamic, so you hear his many different drum and cymbal tones. Also, the feel is so swinging, and that adds to the sound as well. I guess if I had to describe the tone in one word, I'd say that it's "buttery."
Patrick Galligan

Roy Haynes on his recording *Out of the Afternoon*. His drumset has a balanced, tonal quality that makes the room sing with a large focused sound. The master drummer at his finest.
Victor DeLorenzo

The drum mix on *Three Wishes* by Spyro Gyra [with drummer Joel Rosenblatt] is so damn good. I want to harness it for a future record.
Adam Potter

I'm going to go with Buddy Rich's *Big Swing Face*, which the Buddy Rich Big Band recorded live in 1967. The arrangements are super tight, it's an excellent recording, and Rich's drums, which I think were made by Slingerland at the time, are the quintessential sound for a smokin' big band. They were able to go from a whisper to a roar. And then of course, there's Rich's phenomenally tasteful and virtuosic playing.
Ed Kriege

Any of the Miles Davis *–in'* records, such as *Steamin'* or *Workin'*. Philly Joe Jones knew how to get the best tones out of those drums, and his playing is unmistakable.
Eric Hughes

Tony Williams on Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch!* It's so warm yet clear and crackly at the same time. And it's super melodic and grooving. Williams drops bombs and goes for broke. It's everything I love about the drummer, and the kit sounds of the genre and era.
Max Jaffe

Gary Hobbs on Stan Kenton's *Kenton '76*. I love every second of every track, along with Ramon Lopez playing those percussion parts. Every little bongo roll into a nice cymbal hit on the set is so clean.
Kyle Clark

Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers on *Caravan*. The rich timbre of his toms and the precision of his playing throughout this album, and especially on the title track, set it apart. I've heard some drummers refer to other recordings of "Caravan" as sounding like a refrigerator falling down a flight of stairs. But Blakey, the master that he was, maintained rhythmic clarity throughout.
David Izzo-Buckner

I'd say *Montreux Alexander—Live! At the Montreux Festival 1976* by the Monty Alexander Trio with Jeff Hamilton on drums. This record features Hamilton's supreme sensitivity, gracious grooves, and sublime soloing. Bravo!
Tim Crumley

A couple favorites would be John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* [Elvin Jones], Art Pepper's *Art Pepper + Eleven* [Mel Lewis], and Miles Davis's *Milestones* [Philly Joe Jones] and *Miles Smiles* [Tony Williams]. Also, anything engineered by Rudy Van Gelder. Nobody can match the tone quality he captured on Blue Note and Impulse! recordings.
Brandon Allen

I'd say the Chick Corea Akoustic Band's self-titled album. Dave Weckl's drums sound just phenomenal, and the dynamics and mix are great. You can really hear the ghost notes and just how intricate the parts Weckl plays are—right from the opening track of Coltrane's "Bessie's Blues" to, for my money, the best version of "Spain" ever committed to record.
Tim Sowter

Billy Kilson on Dave Holland's *Extended Play: Live at Birdland*. His sound is super aggressive with razor-like precision and a supreme command of space and dynamics. So much is going on at once, but Kilson manages to maintain his own presence without stepping on the arrangement or other players. I also love the bright openness of the toms.
Brendan Bessel

Want your voice heard? Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and keep an eye out for next month's question.

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OUT NOW

John Sparrow
on the Violent Femmes' *Hotel Last Resort*

The perennially popular folk-punk group celebrates nearly forty years with their tenth studio full-length, powered by a longtime percussionist with a unique setup.

After forming in the early 1980s, the iconic folk-punk group Violent Femmes firmly established their place in modern alternative music's annals thanks in part to universally recognizable hits such as "Blister in the Sun" and "Gone Daddy Gone." After building their career busking on the streets of Milwaukee, the band quickly developed a reputation for being one of the loudest acoustic groups to hit a live stage.

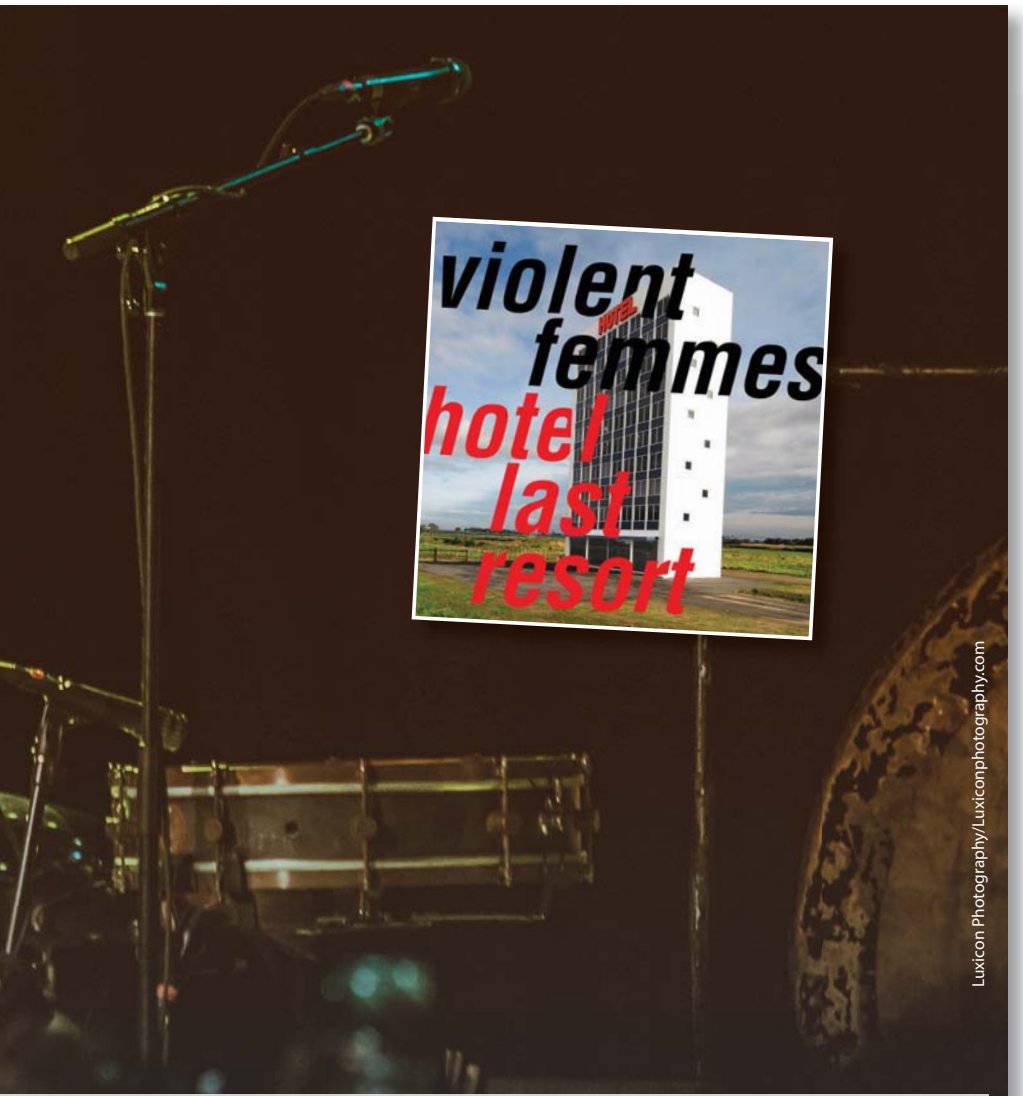
In the ensuing decades, though, the band, which was founded by guitarist and songwriter Gordon Gano, bassist Brian Ritchie, and drummer Victor DeLorenzo, would endure a few drum stool changes as well as two brief but rocky hiatuses, one between 1987 and 1988 and another from 2009 to 2013. After regrouping a second time, the Femmes eventually released 2016's *We Can Do Anything*, which featured Dresden Dolls drummer Brian Viglione.

Now this past July 26, following another throne shift, the group released their tenth studio effort, *Hotel Last Resort*, which features drummer John Sparrow. Though Sparrow has been behind the skins officially since 2016, he's in fact played percussion with them since the mid 2000s.

Sparrow tells *MD* that he nabbed the Femmes gig somewhat unexpectedly. "In the summer of 2005 I was playing drums in Brian's band, Shakuhachi Club MKE. One afternoon Brian asked me to come hang out with him at his home. When I arrived, he asked me to sit on a cajon and jam with him. He was playing bass, not shakuhachi [a traditional Japanese bamboo flute], which I thought was strange. We played some basic feels, and then he played Violent Femmes' first record and asked me to play along. I was confused, but I went along with it. I've known the Femmes' songs since I was fifteen, so fortunately I had it covered. Afterward he wrote three dates on a piece of paper, handed it to me, and said, 'You're going on tour with the Violent Femmes. Call our tour manager, and go work on the rest of the catalog.' That's how that went down." [laughs]

Throughout *Hotel Last Resort*, Sparrow's minimalist backbeats growl behind Gano's unique, cutting croon. The drummer draws a massive drive from a fairly simple setup, which includes a Weber grill and some tasty A&F tubs. Here we check in with Sparrow about the Femmes' latest effort.

MD: What was the writing process like for *Hotel Last Resort*?
John: Gordon wrote all the songs and brought them in for us. He played us a few songs in the dressing room [on tour] before going into the studio to record. With the exception of those few songs, the majority of tunes were presented and learned in the studio control room before we tracked them.
MD: What type of input does the band have on your parts?
John: Brian and Gordon suggest feels and fills here and there for sure, but I'm left to interpret the songs on my own.
MD: Considering the unique gear, what was the recording process like in the studio?



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John: My setup in the studio was the same as it is live. I use a 4x18 A&F Gun Shot steel snare, a 22" Weber kettle grill, and a 4x18 A&F Whiskey Maple tom. I use Regal Tip Jeff Hamilton brushes and Joe Calato sticks live, and I stuck with those in the studio as well. And I used my Schlagwerk bass cajon with no snares [engaged] on a few songs.

In the studio we set up and really don't need to take much time getting sounds. Violent Femmes have a sound of our own, and we just focus on capturing it. We record everything live in the studio, including the vocal take. This approach helps capture our live energy. There were some percussion and vocal harmony overdubs, but what you hear is essentially live.

MD: What do you work on for technique? You seem to have a precise, focused grip, even when you're playing on a grill.

John: I spent a lot of time on my technique. I used to watch and study Jim Chapin and Joe Morello VHS tapes with my dad over and over. I spent many hours on the practice pad focusing on the Moeller technique. And I developed my own version of Morello's "Stone Killer" exercise, which I still use before each show. I've also been very fond of Power Wrist Builder drumsticks over the past ten years.

MD: What's your process for adapting another drummer's parts live?

John: I learn the basic drum beat first. Then I listen for signature fills and use those consistently. The obvious example of this would be on "Blister in the Sun." If I didn't play the signature snare hits we all know in that song, it wouldn't be right. They are a *part* of the song. I don't copy every fill note-for-note, and in some cases I might not play a fill that was originally on the recording. I have a healthy amount of freedom to play around with ideas, but the whole band does, too. Violent Femmes is very much like a jazz band in that we improvise within the song each night.

Willie Rose

John Sparrow endorses A&F drums, Regal Tip sticks, and Schlagwerk percussion.

More New Releases

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Order in Decline (Frank Zummo)

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Bruno Esrubilsky
with Mitski

The Argentine-born, Brazilian-raised, New York–based drummer fuels the vivid, dark, and explosive indie rocker on the road.

In August of 2018, the Japanese-American indie singer-songwriter Mitski released *Be the Cowboy*, her fifth studio full-length since 2012 and her most commercially successful to date. The artist's latest effort draws from various styles—'60s guitar pop, '70s disco, '80s synth-driven electronica, '90s biting grunge—all of which coexist easily amid her dreamy vocal melodies and raw, straight-from-the-diary lyrics.

Live, though, Mitski's songs inhabit a new skin, infused with vigorous energy provided in part by the artist's touring drummer, Bruno Esrubilsky. For evidence, check YouTube for the Brooklyn Steel performance of "Drunk Walk Home," from 2014's *Bury Me at Makeout Creek*. Behind the singer's wild onstage movements, Esrubilsky pounds primal toms in 6/4 before launching into a steadfast march pattern that sets up the song's exhilarating full-group climax: a collective buzz saw of distorted bass, guitar, and synth, with the drummer deftly steering its cut.

Esrubilsky grew up in Rio de Janeiro, feasting on a hearty diet of progressive rock and Brazilian ethnic music. "In hindsight," says Bruno, "it was great getting into prog rock while studying jazz and Brazilian rhythms in Rio in the midst of Carnaval culture. And being a huge Rush fan really called me toward drumming." *MD* recently spoke with Esrubilsky about the latest Mitski international run, which goes through September.

MD: How did you land the gig with Mitski?
Bruno: After touring for a few years while based out of New York City, I got to work with lots of artists and connect with people in the industry, including managers and agents. Being professional on the road and creating a solid reputation for yourself are huge. People will hopefully talk about you and recommend you for other gigs.
MD: What's the band's rehearsal process like for a tour?
Bruno: First we learn all the songs individually and then rehearse together for a few days before it starts. I usually write down roadmaps of the tunes, which helps me memorize them faster. I make notes of important spots throughout the song. Come rehearsal time, we play each song repeatedly until it feels right. Then we work on transitions—who cues what, who starts what, that kind of thing.
MD: How do you approach Mitski's drum parts live as compared to the drums on her album tracks?
Bruno: I try to find a middle ground where I'm fully representing the record while also playing it my way. Mitski's music is a whirlwind of styles. You can go from classical to swing, punk rock, pop, electronic, heavier rock, and disco within the same show. That makes my job more fun, as I get to find many approaches.

I also blend all the electronic aspects of her music within the acoustic kit. Instead of backing tracks, we often have long samples that I fire on a Roland SPD-SX sampler. It's great not being attached to a computer, and I like the responsibility of firing all the electronic sounds.

MD: Do you play to a click live?
Bruno: We use a Boss DB-90 metronome. I switch the tempo between songs, and it runs smoothly. I like how traditional it feels.
MD: Do you have any advice for playing along to one?
Bruno: I've practiced to a click my whole life. By now I think of it almost as another instrument playing in the background instead of giving it too much focus. I couldn't recommend enough the importance of practicing to a click. Always start slow and build your way up, with as much dynamic range as possible.
MD: Do you have a warm-up routine on the road?
Bruno: My personal bag of tricks includes jumping rope backstage, running around outside the venue, and stretching. Then I spend a few minutes on a Reflexx practice pad practicing rudiments and playing the Charley Wilcoxon book, *The All-American Drummer*, which I always carry on tour. Jumping rope is my favorite, though—that works my whole body and gets me really pumped for the show.
MD: What do you practice for technique?
Bruno: In the past, I was deep into Moeller technique. And for a long time I worked on my bass drum technique and focused on not burying the beater into the head. I've also always tried to be as relaxed as possible. Working on feeling loose while playing helps me focus and have better posture while playing. The way I look at it now, I sort of let the knowledge I've been collecting do its own thing, so I can focus on being musical and share a strong moment with my bandmates onstage, while always trying to learn something new and staying engaged.
MD: How do you maintain your energy each night throughout a set?
Bruno: Every night before I walk onstage I have a little thankful mantra going on in my head that settles me into the moment that's about to come. At that moment I'm talking to myself and acknowledging how lucky I am to do this. I'm thanking life for this path I'm on and reminding myself that this is the fun part of the job. This is where all those years of practice and hard work culminate. I think that's a big part of keeping the energy up onstage for me. Being truly happy to play drums and wanting to give the audience a night to remember fuel me.
Willie Rose

Bruno Esrubilsky endorses Ludwig drums, Zildjian cymbals, Evans heads, Promark sticks, and Roland electronics.

Also on the Road

Johnny Rabb with Collective Soul /// **Scott Hessel** with Gin Blossoms /// **Eric Singer** with Kiss /// **Charlie Watts** with the Rolling Stones /// **Reed Mullin** with Corrosion of Conformity /// **Jason Roeder** with Neurosis /// **Robi Gonzalez** with This Will Destroy You

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Bucks County Drum Co. founder Chris Carr developed the Prime series in order to provide an alternative to his flagship Semi Solid custom line for players looking for a more traditional ply-shell drumset without sacrificing quality and craftsmanship. Available in three configurations (8x12, 14x16, and 15x22; 9x13, 15x16, and 14x24; 8x12, 14x14, and 16x20), Prime series drums are made from 6-ply shells of cherry, walnut, or oak. We were sent the 12"/16"/22" Criterion setup with cherry shells.

The Specs

Contrasting the Semi Solid series, which can be custom-ordered in just about any species or combination of species for a fully customized kit, Prime series drums are limited to three configurations and wood types, and they all feature the same hardware, bearing edges, Evans drumheads, and natural satin finish. The rack toms come with five lugs rather than the standard six, and they feature Bucks County's proprietary tone mount that allows for unencumbered resonance without excessive bulk.

The rims on the toms are 2.3 mm triple-flange steel, and the lugs are a full-length tube design. The floor tom legs are bolted to the shell and isolated with plastic gaskets. The bass drum spurs are an old-school gull-wing style that are set at a fixed length but allow for some height adjustability depending on how they are angled. The toms have Evans G2 Coated batters and G1 Clear bottoms. The bass drum has a single-ply EQ4 Clear batter with an internal dampening ring and an EQ3 Coated front, which is a 7.5-mil head with a 10-mil overtone control ring.

The three Prime series configurations were selected to provide the most versatility while targeting specific sounds and applications. The Paragon setup (9x13, 15x16, and 14x24) is ideal for rock, modern country, and anything requiring big, deep tones. The Classic has an old-school jazz/R&B vibe, with 8x12 and 14x14 toms, and a slightly deeper 16x20 bass drum. The Criterion that we got for review sits right in the middle. It comprises an 8x12 rack tom, a 14x16 floor tom, and a 15x22 bass drum. The word *criterion* means "a principle or standard by which something may be judged or decided," and aside from situations requiring super-quiet and small drums, like unamplified jazz or acoustic singer/songwriter gigs, this Prime set could easily be your go-to kit.

The Sounds

The first time I played this Prime series cherry kit was for a clinic at the Delaware Drum Show. The room held about a hundred people and was a typical small banquet-style hall, complete with tile flooring and wood paneling on the walls. The drums were tuned in the medium range, but the sounds they emitted through the room were massive without being unruly. The bass drum had incredible punch plus a deep, warm tone. Everyone I talked to after the clinic commented on how great the bass drum sounded. And that was without adjusting the tuning at all and with no muffling. The toms sounded equally rich and warm, and they were very responsive at all dynamics. Light strokes and hard hits all elicited a full tone with clean articulation and a quick but balanced decay.

When I got the kit back to my studio, I put it through its paces, starting with the drums tuned as high as they could go and then exploring each tuning below that. All three drums were amazingly consistent throughout the entire range, producing pure, musical notes with perfectly balanced attack and resonance, and fast but smooth decay. Not many drumsets can be played wide-open and sound like they've been tuned, dampened, and tweaked to perfection. The Prime series can. They're also surprisingly lightweight. Win-win.

All three-piece Prime series shell packs list for $2,195.

Michael Dawson

Canopus

Stabilized Wood Snares

Bold and beautiful drums backed up by exceptional musicality.

Although its marketing strategy has been to remain relatively quiet and unassuming, Japanese drum maker Canopus has been building some of the most musical and meticulously crafted snares and kits since its foundation in 1977. From spot-on vintage and classic replicas to forward-thinking and cutting-edge designs, like the two snares we have here, you'd be hard-pressed to find fault with anything wearing the Canopus badge. Our review drums are from the new Stabilized Wood series, which comprises a 9-ply maple shell with an outer veneer that's been treated with a special resin and lacquered to reveal a spectacular flowing color pattern, in either Buckeye Turquoise or Buckeye Violet.

Specs and Sounds

Stabilized Wood snares are available in one size: 6.5x14. But they can be ordered with brass, chrome, or black-nickel hardware and with either triple-flange steel hoops or die-cast ones. We received a Buckeye Violet drum with die-cast hoops and chrome hardware and a Buckeye Turquoise drum with brass triple-flange hoops and hardware. Both were outfitted with Remo Ambassador Coated batters and Ambassador Snare bottoms, as well as Canopus's snappy-style wires. The throw-off is the company's standard version, with a smooth side-action lever and knurled thumb screw. One subtle yet significant detail on all Canopus drums is the inclusion of Bolt Tight leather washers on every tension rod. These washers do a great job of preventing the drum from detuning as you play. They

VIDEO DEMO
moderndrummer.com

also help tame down some of the metallic ring. As a result, these drums have an amazingly full and balanced voice that can be played wide open at any tuning without being plagued by bright and biting overtones.

Both drums had wide tuning ranges and exceptional snare sensitivity all the way out to the edge. I don't think I could pinpoint my favorite tuning for each; they honestly sounded incredible from high to low. The triple-flange version had a more open voice with a broader sound, while the die-cast drum was more focused and direct. The overtones on the triple-flange drum were more balanced across the frequency spectrum, which to my ear gave it a more satisfying spray, while the die-cast drum produced a more discernible pitch in the middle and lower registers. Neither drum rang so much as to require muffling, but in a pure side-by-side comparison, I would favor the die-cast drum for tight tunings and louder gigs, while the triple-flange could be a strong first-choice for just about any situation. The multicolored finishes are also surefire showstoppers without being gaudy. These snares represent yet another strong statement from one of the industry's quietest champions.

Michael Dawson

Roland

TM-1 Trigger Module and RT-MicS Mic/Trigger

Streamlined starting points for expanding your acoustic kit with electronics.

Not only is Roland a leading manufacturer of professional-quality e-kits, but it's also dedicated considerable research and development into smaller, simpler products that allow acoustic drummers to expand their sonic palettes with electronics. For review this month is the new TM-1 stomp-box trigger module ($249.99), which has two trigger inputs, and the self-contained RT-MicS mic/trigger processor ($350.99), which allows you to blend the acoustic drum sound captured by an onboard microphone with one of eight preloaded samples.

TM-1 Trigger Module

If you're looking to dip your toe into the world of electronics, or if you're just looking to supplement your acoustic drum sound with a couple triggered elements, the TM-1 trigger module is for you. This compact, battery-powered module has two trigger inputs, a stereo main output, a headphone output, a DC adapter input (cable not included), and a USB jack that allows you to change and edit the supplied sounds, upload original samples, and configure kits via a computer or mobile device that has Roland's free editor app installed.

The module is designed similarly to a guitar stomp box, complete with rotating knobs to adjust the triggers' sensitivity as well as the samples' pitch, decay, and output level. The TM-1 comes with fifteen ready-to-play kits, and the LED screen displays the kit number that's currently being used. The two sturdy switches allow you to use your foot to change kits, mute the module (by pressing both at once), or trigger sounds.

In order to use the TM-1 effectively, you'll need to supplement it with either acoustic drum triggers or stand-alone trigger pads, like an RT-30H trigger ($99.99) or an 8" PD-8 rubber pad ($109.99). There's also the option to link the two samples to a dual-zone pad or trigger via the editor app.

The preset kits provide a variety of acoustic and electronic kick, snare, and percussive sounds that should suffice for most applications. But to get the full scope of what the TM-1 can do, you'll want to utilize the editor app to upload your own samples and customize the kits to suit your own needs.

RT-MicS Mic Trigger Processor

An even simpler option for adding triggered sounds to your arsenal is the RT-MicS mic trigger processor. This compact, 9V-battery-powered device clips to a drum hoop like a regular Roland trigger, and it includes a piezoelectric pickup for triggering electronic samples and a small condenser mic for capturing acoustic sounds. A large, round button scrolls through the eight preloaded samples when pressed, and the ring around the button illuminates each time a sample is triggered. There are separate quarter-inch outputs for electronic and acoustic sounds, while the electronic output can also be used as a mix output of both signals. There are separate control wheels for the trigger and mic volume and trigger sensitivity, and the unit is held securely to the hoop via a large thumbscrew.

The preloaded sounds in the RT-MicS include a higher-pitched and resonant snare, a deep and punchy snare, dry and reverberant handclaps, a tambourine, and three electronic snare-type sounds. The deep snare and tambourine had the most natural tones, while the other sounds provoked more produced, electronic vibes.

The sensitivity wheel provides plenty of range, so you can set up the RT-MicS to have the trigger fire at all dynamics or only during harder strikes. The built-in mic is very sensitive, so it will pick up ghost notes and light strokes with the same accuracy and clarity as rim shots.

You can also upload your own samples (up to ten seconds in length) to the RT-MicS, via a computer or mobile device, when using a micro-USB cable and Roland's RT-MicS Wave Sender app. In addition to sample uploading, the Wave Sender allows you to determine if the sample is to be triggered from any strike above the sensitivity threshold or only from rim hits. This Rim Only option is a great way to separate the triggered sample from the acoustic sound based on where you strike the drum, rather than via playing dynamics. The separate mic and trigger outputs on the RT-MicS also make for a streamlined setup (fewer cables, mics, stands, etc.) and cleaner signal paths for your front-of-house mix or studio recordings.

Michael Dawson

Kuppmen

Carbon Fiber Drumsticks and Drumrods

Synthetic options for utmost durability without sacrificing feel and sound.

The wooden drumstick has been a constant through centuries of drumming. But as with any organic material, wood is not always consistent, nor is it particularly durable. Holland-based Kuppmen Music, a revival of the Carbostick company, which ceased production in 2013, offers a line of drumsticks and rods made from carbon fiber that claim to offer greater durability with minimal change in feel or sound.

Drumsticks

The main goal of Kuppmen is to provide more durable tools, but its website also boasts that its sticks are "just as flexible as wooden sticks" and are "made straight and stay straight." While these carbon fiber sticks will show dents and scratches over time, they won't splinter or chip like wood. Kuppmen sent us pairs in 5A, 7A, and 5B sizes with teardrop-shaped beads. They were straight and weight-matched, and the tips never chipped during our two-month evaluation period.

Feel and Sound

The Kuppmen carbon fiber sticks have a dense feel that's similar to that of oak. I use hickory sticks most of the time, and the Kuppmens vibrated more noticeably than them while I played. The vibrating could cause premature hand fatigue over the course of a long gig, so you'll want to spend some time with them in the practice room so you can adjust to the different response.

Kuppmen's website features a nice video in which the company addresses whether or not these sticks sound like wooden ones. Their answer is mostly yes, but to my ear the stick tips sound harder than nylon, rim clicks cut more and have a brighter attack, and rim shots are louder. All of that might be a benefit for louder playing situations. List price is $39.99 per pair.

Drumrods

Kuppmen's Drumrods, which come in 5A and 5B sizes, aim to be more durable than wooden dowel sticks. As with the carbon fiber drumsticks, the Drumrods sound a bit brighter, and they feel heavier in your hands. Compared with wooden dowels, I found that the extra weight helped with control. Unlike wooden rods, the dowels of the Drumrods won't break while you play or when you put them back in your stick bag. This extra durability alone could make them worth the investment. List price is $45.99 per pair.

Stephen Bidwell

Gibraltar's new
GSSVR Stealth Side V-Rack

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GEARING UP *ON STAGE AND UP CLOSE*

Josh Freese

With the Vandals

"It's funny that we're doing this gear thing," Josh Freese tells us, as we catch up with him between world tours with pop/rock legend Sting and a one-off show at the House of Blues in Anaheim with his longtime punk band the Vandals. "I think some guys who have more time to prepare might show up with extra gear that they might not normally use. But we decided to do this last-minute, and I've had this kit for almost fifteen years. I have two kits at my house. One is set up in my studio with microphones on it, so that never leaves. This kit is what I use for quick gigs here and there. I don't go out of my way to beat it up, but I don't mind if it gets a nick or scratch here or there. They don't need to go into a museum—though they're gorgeous. And they sound great.

"When I first started playing Paiste cymbals, I only used the Signature series," Freese continues. "That's what made me fall in love with their stuff. There are other things that they're making that I haven't even checked out yet. My go-tos are the Signature, Dark Energy, and some Twenty series. I like rotating some sounds, but I never go too far out. You'll never see me using only two splashes and 20" hi-hats. When I'm on tour, my setup's not changing. I've got some backup cymbals in case one breaks, but I'll go like eight months with the exact same setup. When I'm home, it's more whatever I feel like throwing in the car that day. But again, it's never too drastic. Even though there's a huge array of things that Paiste and DW make, I feel like I've found what I like. I'm like, 'This sounds great, so let's move on.'"

Interview by John Martinez **Photos by Alex Solca**

Drums: DW Collector's series maple in white lacquer finish with silver stripe
A. 6x14 snare
B. 9x12 tom
C. 16x16 floor tom
D. 18x22 bass drum

Cymbals: Paiste
1. 14" Signature Dark Energy hi-hats
2. 18" Signature Full crash
3. 21" Twenty ride
4. 19" Signature Full crash

Heads: Remo Controlled Sound Coated snare batter, Emperor Coated tom batters, Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batter

In-ear monitors: JH Audio Roxanne

Hardware: DW 9000 series double pedal, DW 5000 series two-leg hi-hat stand, and a Roc-N-Soc throne

Sticks: Vater Josh Freese H-220

1
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4
A
B
C
D
REMO
dw
9000
5000
ROC-N-SOC

In the Studio with O.A.R.'s Chris Culos

Story and photos by Sayre Berman

Chris Culos has come a long way since 1996, when he and bandmate Marc Roberge started O.A.R. in the basement of his childhood home. Twenty-three years later the band is still making new music and touring amphitheaters around the U.S.

Culos and his wife moved to the suburbs of Nashville, Tennessee, in 2013. "We found a neighborhood that was just being developed," he says. "We were able to build a house from scratch. That meant that I was able to design a home studio rather than convert something into a studio."

What would have been designated a pool house in conventional blueprints became a 400-square-foot studio with 18-foot vaulted ceilings. "This is definitely adequate for what I had in mind," he says. "It's my studio and my office, and I can teach here, jam with friends, and work with writers. It has everything I need. I wanted a live-sounding room with a lot of natural light.

"In order to minimize the level of noise coming from the room, we used 2-ply drywall with soundproof glue between each ply," Chris continues. "The air gap between that and the outside brick wall prevents a lot of the sound from escaping. We also added a second layer of noise-reducing glass to the existing windows and doors. The ductwork was designed with a zigzag S shape, and the outlets and vents were wrapped and treated to displace some of the sound."

Jeff Hedback of HdAcoustics and Nashville-based audio engineer Marc Meeker designed the room for optimal acoustics. "The process was intense," recalls Culos. "They built a three-dimensional virtual model that replicated the room down to the smallest of details. Sound tests were run on that.

"Excessive midrange decay was our biggest challenge," Chris continues. "The solution was decorative wall tile—not an acoustical tile—discovered by Hedback, who found that the acoustical properties of their shape, depth, and spacing were perfect. They're simply squares of cardboard, but their shape disperses the sound

Chris's Studio Gear

Snares: Sugar Percussion 6x14 Black Cherry, Slingerland 4.5x14 Super Sound King chrome-over-brass, Ludwig 6.5x14 Black Beauty and Supraphonic, Ludwig 5.5x14 Super Classic, Ludwig 5x14 Pioneer and Acrolite, Ludwig 7x13 Black Magic, Maryland Drum Company 6x13 Maple, Sakae Trilogy 5.5x14 maple/poplar/maple, Yamaha 3x14 copper piccolo, Yamaha 5.5x14 Maple Custom

Drumsets: Ludwig Classic Maple in Champagne Sparkle finish (12", 14", 20"), 1967 Slingerland in Aqua Satin Flame finish (13", 16", 24"), Maryland Drum Company Maple (12", 16", 22"), Yamaha Recording Custom (8", 10", 12", 14", 16", 22")

Cymbals: assorted new and vintage Zildjians

Sticks: Vater Los Angeles 5A

Hardware: Ludwig ATLAS Pro

Drumheads: Remo Ambassador Coated and Emperor Clear

In-Ear Monitors: JH Audio Roxanne and Layla models

Recording Equipment: UA Apollo 8 QUAD and Apollo 8p interfaces, Lindell Audio 500 series rack, API 512c preamps, Neve 511 preamps, Pro Tools, Logic Pro X, Ableton Live, Focal Shape Twin and ADAM A5X monitors

Microphones: Shure SM57, SM81, KSM32, Beta 98A/C, Beta 57, and Beta 52, and an Audio-Technica AT4033/CL

exactly the way expensive acoustical tile would." (You can check out the tiles at http://mioculture.com/shop/wall-ceiling-tiles/acoustic-weave-paperforms-white.)

The studio has absorption panels on the walls, made by Simplified Acoustics, along with a pair of GIK Acoustics Soffit Bass Traps that sit in the corners of the room. A custom panel also hangs two feet below the ceiling. "Working with the vaulted ceiling became a little tricky," Chris says. "But Hedback created an acoustical pergola by affixing three of the MIO tiles onto separate absorption panels suspended in a frame. That tamed the room just enough without killing it."

The five members of O.A.R. live in different cities, but advancements in technology have made collaboration easy. "We used to record our parts and then send it on to the next band member," says Culos. "Now we use the cloud, so we can all be on a session at the same time and make real-time decisions. Now that I have this space, I can quickly open a template in Pro Tools and begin recording. I have a vintage kit, a modern kit, a Recording Custom kit, an arsenal of snare drums, and all sorts of percussive tools, so it's nice to have all of that stuff ready to go. I do a lot of experimentation in here."

For recording gear, Culos relies on a range of classic and modern tools. "I have two UA Apollo interfaces," he says. "That gives me a total of sixteen channels. I wanted to use some outboard gear, so I have API 512c 500 series mic preamps for the kick and snare and Rupert Neve Design 511 preamps for my overheads. Hedback and Meeker suggested that I save money by using a package of Shure mics. The mics I've chosen offer great versatility."

Culos currently has four drumsets in his studio, but he has a nostalgic favorite. "It's a 1967 Slingerland that belonged to my dad," he says. "It had been in my parents' basement for years. Sam Bacco here in Nashville did the restoration. When I was in college at Ohio State, we were touring on the weekends and I needed a high-quality drumset. The band had saved up some money, so I purchased a Yamaha Recording Custom set. Over the years, I've accumulated probably every tom size available for that kit. But I've endorsed Ludwig for the past ten years, and I've been so incredibly happy with my Classic Maple kit on the road that I ordered a second set for my home studio."

Culos has been recording with O.A.R. for over twenty years, but he admits to being a little tentative around audio engineers. "I didn't grow up speaking the language," he says. "But now that I have my own studio, I've learned so much and can communicate with engineers in their language. So much of that just comes from experience—learning the correct way to tune a drum and put a mic on it. I'm getting better at all of that."

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Nir Z

Story by Michael Dawson Photos by Chad Crawford

Few things about his career have been predictable—so few, in fact, that during the most intense times of his life, it's made him truly struggle with deciding on the way forward. Yet today he's among the most in-demand musicians in one of the most competitive music markets in the world, and in retrospect his path to success makes perfect, poetic sense.

"I got to tell you, buddy, this is my life right now," jokes Nir "Z" Zidkyahu as he Skypes in to us from his private studio in Franklin, Tennessee. Nir's trying to get a handle on his next week of work, which includes recording sessions with pop singer/songwriter Colbie Caillat's new band Gone West, the progressive band Rayburn, and an anonymous French Canadian artist. Also on his schedule: a video date for Sonor to demonstrate the versatility of the Vintage series, and a handful of out-of-town gigs with rising star Caroline Jones, who's currently the opening act on Kenny Chesney's *Songs for the Saints* tour. "If they hadn't sent me these Colbie files, I would have totally forgotten we had a session."

Such is the life when you're one of the most in-demand musicians on the planet. And being busy isn't something the fifty-one-year-old drummer takes for granted. "I truly believe that if you want something to happen, you have to be there," he says. Back in 1993, Nir knew it was time to make a move, leaving behind a successful playing career in Tel Aviv, Israel, to see how well his poignant, ultra-precise, and endlessly creative drumming gelled with the vibrant pop and alternative rock scenes that were thriving in New York City at that time.

How did he do, you ask? Well, despite the fact that Nir is adamant to dispel any notion that he should be considered the "ultimate session guy," his track record speaks for itself. First off, he is one of only two drummers not named Collins to play in the studio with prog-rock-turned-pop legends Genesis since 1971. (The band's 1997 album, *Calling All Stations*, features Nir and Nick D'Virgilio on drums, with Nir taking over full-time duties with the band thereafter.) A few years later, Nir's crystalline touch and cracking backbeat were being pumped into every corner of the planet thanks to the string of megahits he played on John Mayer's debut record, *Room for Squares*. Other chart-toppers followed, including teenage sensation Joss Stone's sophomore album, *Mind, Body & Soul*, and acoustic pop singer/songwriter Jason Mraz's *Mr. A–Z*. Nir also got to flex his more alt-rock-leaning muscles on grunge-rock pioneer Chris Cornell's debut solo effort, *Carry On*.

Things began to change around the turn of the century, however, as many of the major recording studios around New York City started shutting down. Rather than cry foul, Nir rented a commercial space in Brooklyn so he could build his own studio to continue doing session work. He also dove headfirst into the cutting-edge drum sample industry, producing multiple libraries for Toontrack's seminal Superior Drummer and EZdrummer plug-in software. Then Nir dusted off his touring boots to hit the road with arena-rock legend Billy Squier for two tours.

By 2011, it was time to make another major move. All signs were pointing to Nashville, the last remaining hub for live recording artists, so Nir packed up his drums and relocated his family to his current residence a few miles south of Music City, in Franklin, Tennessee. While Nashville may seem like an unusual landing spot for an Israeli New Yorker, it didn't take long for Nir's diamond-sharp chops and passionate artistry to start capturing the attention of many of the country music scene's top producers, engineers, songwriters, and artists, ultimately scoring major recording credits with Florida Georgia Line, the Judds, Hunter Hayes, Love and Theft, Lee Brice, Dan + Shay, Blake Shelton, and more. Nir even won an "all-star musician" award from the Nashville-based industry publication *MusicRow* in 2018 and 2019.

When viewing Nir's twenty-five-plus-year career from a macro perspective, it could be easy to conclude that the drummer has been on a steady upward climb since landing his first major gig in Israel at age twenty with superstar singer/songwriter Yehuda Poliker. But when we dug deeper into his story, we discovered that there were plenty of hard lessons learned along the way. So let's take it from the top, shall we?

MD: How did you get started on drums?
Nir: My parents say that when I was around five years old, we walked past a music store in Jerusalem that had a blue sparkle Premier drumkit in the window, and I just stood there for like twenty minutes. But I honestly never had to think about what I wanted to do when I grew up. My father had a love for drumming, and he was pretty good on the dumbek. That was my first instrument. I used to put three of them around me to create a drumset, and then I would play to the radio.
MD: What were you listening to?
Nir: My mom loved Elvis, Paul Anka, and the disco band Boney M. I used to play along to those records. Then when I was around nine, I took classical lessons from an American teacher named Pamela Jones. That was when I got my first practice pad and started learning the rudiments. She was very precise and rules-oriented. But dumbek was really my main instrument.
MD: Were you learning traditional music on it?
Nir: I never really studied it. I'm familiar with the authentic rhythms, but I don't have all those chops. Middle Eastern grooves are a big part of my musical culture, because every time we went to a party or something, that music would be in the background.
MD: Does Middle Eastern music still influence you?
Nir: Definitely. There's always been a big connection back to Africa. That's why reggae and Latin-flavored music feel very natural to me. It's all related, just with different accents. Lately, I've been getting calls to do percussion overdubs on some reggae-inspired songs. There are better percussionists than me in town, but I guess they want something with a more authentic feel, and that ballroom reggae rhythm is pretty much the same as what is played on dumbek. So that influence is always there, for good or bad.
MD: How could that be bad?
Nir: It's a different kind of thing. The first time someone told me that I was swinging things too much was when I got to Nashville. For example, it's almost impossible for me to play a train beat without swinging it a little bit. I could play it straight, but I would have to think about it, and that's a bummer. [laughs]
MD: When did you get your first drumset?
Nir: Around the time of my bar mitzvah, we moved to Tel Aviv, which culturally is

> "I want what I play to be pure. I'm not saying that you shouldn't listen and try to do what you're asked. But it's a fine line."

like moving from Memphis to New York City. When we got there, my father got me a cheap acrylic drumset, and the first vinyl I bought was "Sultans of Swing" by Dire Straits. I started playing along to that and any other records I could get my hands on.

MD: Do you think it's important for drummers to play along to records?

Nir: Absolutely. We used to have to listen to records and come up with our own interpretations of how to play something, versus going on YouTube and getting all the information. That's the biggest difference between having influences and copying somebody. You lose many opportunities to discover things that are hidden inside of you when you get trapped in worshipping heroes.

MD: Did you start taking drumset lessons in Tel Aviv?

Nir: Yes. I started studying at a conservatory there with a teacher who had me listen to Ahmad Jamal, Dave Brubeck, and Max Roach records. That was a tremendous journey.

Three years later, I started studying with David Rich, who was a student of Joe Morello. I was learning Joe's concepts through David, like playing the two-stroke roll and paradiddles as triplets. My goal was to be a jazz drummer, but I was also playing more commercial music and rock with my friends.

Then at eighteen, it was army time, which was a completely shocking experience. I turned into a very angry kid. I was living music 24/7, and then all of a sudden I was in a uniform and learning how to shoot guns. I carried that anger with me for many years afterwards.

But when I was around twenty, I got recommended to play with one of the biggest artists in Israel, Yehuda Poliker. From there, I started getting calls to do a lot of sessions.

MD: So why leave Israel for New York City?

Nir: New York City was a place I always knew I was going to move to. The only connection I had there was with the bassist Yossi Fine. Yossi produced a record in Israel, and he hired me to play. He told me I needed to go to New York. Then when he came back to town for some gigs, he had Steven Wolf on drums. I met Steve, and we became great friends.

I moved to New York in 1993. The city was booming with music at that time, and I started playing in every scenario possible. Then Wolf recommended me for a band called Hidden Persuaders, which eventually became Splender. I felt like I began to create my own identity with that band. We got a publishing deal with Hit & Run Music, which was owned by Tony Smith, the manager for Genesis. Tony came to a show and loved my performance, so he took some recordings of me back to England to play for [Genesis's guitaist/bassist and keyboardist] Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks. Next thing

you know, I got a call to fly to England to audition for the band. This was a complete shock. I went from living a broke musician life to flying first-class to play with Genesis.

MD: That had to have been a weird experience.

Nir: Weird is an understatement. [laughs] They didn't send me any material, and they didn't want me to prepare anything. We just played. I had no clue what I was getting into, but they were making *Calling All Stations*. After I got back to New York, I got a call from Tony Smith telling me that they wanted me to do the tour. From that moment, my life changed. I was making a lot of money, and I didn't need to worry about anything. That was the good side of it….

MD: What was the bad side?

Nir: I was practicing a lot, so I was in great shape, but I was under tremendous pressure. It took me some time to understand that when you're taking over such a big gig as Genesis, there's no way you'll be able to please everyone. That was very difficult for me to deal with. But they chose me, so all I could do was just go out and do my thing.

MD: Do you know why they hired you?

Nir: Mike Rutherford told me that I had the exact combination of things they were looking for, and I brought some of that New York energy.

MD: Did you know that the Genesis gig was going to be just one tour?

Nir: No. The plan was to keep going. We had a great tour in Europe, but they cancelled the tour in the States because it didn't sell enough. Then after about a year they decided they weren't going to continue. It was very difficult, but I went back to New York and started doing sessions. I had some buzz, which was how I started working with producer/engineer Neil Dorfsman and the singer Alana Davis.

MD: How did you end up on John Mayer's first album, *Room for Squares*?

Nir: There were a lot of A&R guys going around the clubs in New York. One guy from Epic Records became a friend, so he recommended me to John's producer, John Alagía. I knew right away that John Mayer was going to be big, but I still had a scar from the Genesis experience. So I couldn't see myself touring in a van or whatever. And I wasn't easy to deal with. I had a very short fuse. I don't think enough people talk about it, but if you have issues with depression or anger, it doesn't matter how good you are—it's going to affect your career.

MD: How did it impact your career?

Nir: Even though I believe that I always brought something fresh to the table, I had this energy that I wasn't going to take shit from anyone. People could just feel it, and I wish I wouldn't have waited so long to take care of it. Thankfully my wife made me realize that I had to before I killed someone.

MD: How old were you at that time?

Nir: I was about thirty-five. It took me a long time to accept that I had reasons to be angry. I didn't want to go into the army, but I was forced to do that. And I did the best job I possibly could with Genesis, but it wasn't up to me. The problem is that if you're not taking care of these things, you're going to run into a lot of people in this business that will trigger you. So the biggest tip I can give to any young musician out there who wants to do what I do is this: don't be afraid or ashamed if you have a mental issue. Go to a

Listener's Guide

Caroline Jones Bare Feet /// **Florida Georgia Line** Can't Say I Ain't Country /// **Michael Ray** Amos /// **Chris Cornell** Carry On /// **Carrie Underwood** Cry Pretty /// **Dan + Shay** Dan + Shay, Obsessed /// **Blake Shelton** Texoma Shore, If I'm Honest, Bringing Back the Sunshine /// **Lee Brice** Lee Brice, I Don't Dance /// **Jake Owen** American Love /// **John Oates** Good Road to Follow /// **Genesis** R-Kive, Live in Poland, Calling All Stations /// **Andy Grammer** Andy Grammer /// **John Mayer** Room for Squares /// **Jason Mraz** Mr. A–Z /// **Joss Stone** Mind, Body & Soul

professional. At the end of the day, nobody cares if you had to serve in the army or whatever.

MD: All that matters is if you can do the gig and not be a jerk.

Nir: That's exactly it. And I guess when you look at my story you could say that I've been pretty successful, especially considering where everything started. But at the same time, it wasn't as consistent as it could have been if I had taken care of this stuff at an earlier stage. That said, especially in the music business, you're always going to face a lot of assholes, and I'm not the type of guy who can deal with that easily. I admire musicians who can treat it as a business so they will get the call for the next session. But I care too much not to call bullshit.

MD: But part of your appeal is that you bring a bit of that edge to the gig.

Nir: Yes, and that worked for some people, like Mike and Tony with Genesis and Billy Squier, who got me to do two tours with him.

MD: Why did you move from New York City to Nashville?

Nir: I have to thank John Mayer's *Room for Squares*. The producers Wally Wilson and Paul Worley really liked what I did on that, so they brought me down to make a record. It was my first time in Nashville, and I was lucky to play on that album with some of the best session guys in town. Glen Worf was the bass player, and he started spreading the word. So did the bass player Michael Rhodes. Those sessions led me to some great producers in Nashville, like Brent Maher, who started flying me down from New York to make records. So when I finally moved to Nashville, I already had a lot of contacts.

MD: When I think of your drumming, I think of it as being super precise yet super free at the same time. What did you do to develop precision?

Nir: First, the way I want to hear the drumkit requires me to play like that.

MD: Does that come from your influences?

Nir: Yes. Steve Gadd is one of my heroes, and he plays very precisely. And I used to listen to a lot of Bill Bruford, who's also very precise. Those records he did with Allan Holdsworth were big influences on me. That's something I wanted to hear, so I taught myself to play like that.

MD: How would you describe that sound?

Nir: I want to hear and feel everything evenly. When the balance between the kick, hi-hat, and snare is mixed in an extreme way, it makes me uncomfortable. You can practice balance by playing a really simple beat with the hi-hat, snare, and kick at a low dynamic, and then play one of the limbs very loudly while keeping the others quiet. It requires a different kind of coordination and concentration to be able to focus on one part without affecting the others.

MD: What skills are being developed by doing that?

Nir: This type of thing helps you learn to differentiate between how something really sounds versus how you *think* it sounds. It also helps you learn to focus your attention on the other musicians' parts.

MD: I'm surprised by how freely you're able to play in the studio.

Nir: That's what I do, for good or bad. There are guys who prefer you to drive safe and stay in the right lane. But then there are some producers that know that they'll gain more by letting the musicians be themselves, even if they just take eight bars of that and put it into a more conservative take.

MD: Does that make sessions take a bit longer?

Nir: On some projects they want to take the time, which is great. I'd rather get through two or three songs a day than five or six and have them all sound the same. It's a mental thing. When a producer comes up to you

interview continues on page 36

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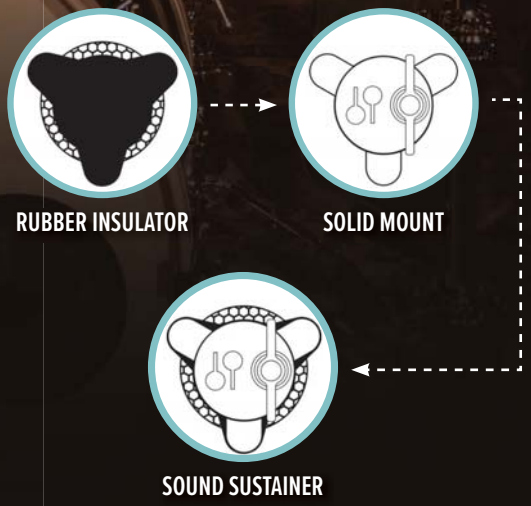

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Nir's Musical Warm-Ups

Here are some exercises that Nir uses to warm up his hands and to get his creative juices flowing.

The first one involves playing different accents within paradiddles.

1

To give those patterns musical context, try putting the right hand on the floor tom and the left hand on the rack tom.

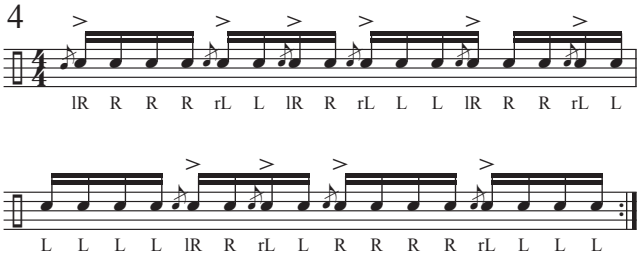
2

Nir also likes to create warm-ups based on melodic rhythmic phrases like those found in Ted Reed's *Syncopation* and Gary Chester's *The New Breed*. To begin, select a simple two-bar rhythm like the following.

3

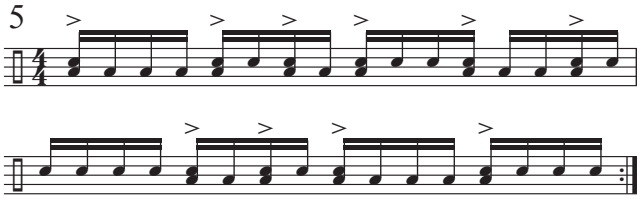
Now play those rhythms as alternating flams within steady 16th notes. Each flam should be followed with continuous strokes using the same hand.

4



To create a sense of melody with those figures, move the right hand to the floor tom, and flatten out the flams so that both hands hit at the same time.

5



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and says, "We've gotta get five songs," automatically you go into a safe mode and play things you know will work. I don't enjoy those types of sessions. I want to hear the singer and the lyrics, and I want to get to a point where I'm not looking at a chart.

MD: And you can't really do that in two takes.

Nir: Sometimes it can happen. But nowadays you not only have the producer in there, but there are also the songwriters and the artist. So in a way, you're facing four different producers, which can be a challenge.

MD: That would put me into a safety mode automatically, just to get through the session.

Nir: Yeah, one of them might want to hear it with closed hi-hat and another one wants it open. There are other guys who are much better at dealing with that type of thing than me. This is why I'm not what you would typically define as an "ultimate session player." There's a limit of how much I can take being told what to do.

MD: What happens? Do you shut down creatively, or do you get outspoken about it?

Nir: I'm very outspoken about it. You don't necessarily want to get into a confrontation, but I also don't want to play a song twenty-five times to the point where I don't want to hear it anymore. There are some guys who can be good soldiers and stay passive about it, and that's okay. But I'm not one of them. I want to make the song the best I can possibly make it. But when there's something that you know isn't right, like if the tempo is too fast or slow, you'll spend much longer talking about it versus just playing it and listening back.

MD: When I was tracking a song at your Brooklyn studio years ago, you said, "I can hear you thinking." What did you mean by that?

Nir: Sometimes people talk too much about the songs, so when you sit behind the drumkit you're thinking so much that you lose all the magic. You have so many words running through your mind that your thoughts are blocking you from responding to what you're hearing in real time.

I'm at a point now where I can memorize the notes I get from the producers, but I won't let them take over my entire mental space so that I can still respond to the music. There have been many times when I was asked to play a certain pattern, but I didn't end up playing it exactly that way because it didn't come out naturally. I want what I play to be pure. I'm not saying that you shouldn't listen and try to do what you're asked. But it's a fine line.

MD: What are you trusting?

Nir: My instincts.

MD: So you can tell emotionally when something is right or wrong?

Nir: With every vein in my body.

MD: How do you approach songs that are presented to you as full productions with programmed drums?

Nir: That's a whole other challenge. When songwriters program virtual drums, the velocities are usually maxed out, and they don't understand why the track doesn't feel the same when a human being is playing the parts. So I've had to train myself to play more evenly. I'll scroll through the top ten singles on iTunes and play along. Most of them will have drum programming.

I practice to those songs for two reasons. First, some young producer in a session next week is probably going to use one of those singles as a reference. Second, it helps me get more familiar with the beats and production styles that are popular.

MD: Do you feel like you need to be more of a chameleon these days?

Nir: For sure. We live in a very interesting time of having to be constantly adapting. Think about someone like Hal Blaine. Not only did he play pretty much the same way on everything, but he also had the same drumkit set up all the time. How many snares do you

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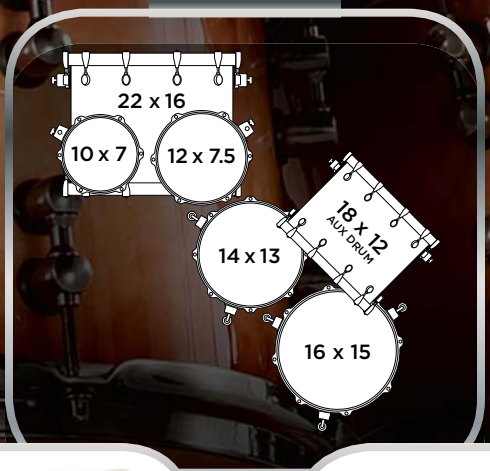

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think he had? He didn't have to deal with the stuff we're going through today. It was all about the song. There was something very pure and naïve about the way they made music back then, which led to some beautiful records.

MD: You said that you like to focus on the vocals. How does the vocal affect what you do?

Nir: I'm listening to the phrasing, so I can get into every nuance of the vocal. If I don't hear the vocalist, I can't really play a song. That carries over to when we go into the control room to listen back. A lot of times the engineer will lower the vocal into the background, but I'm like, "What are we listening to? I hear that it's grooving and it sounds good, but where's the song?"

That relates to how I respond when people request something specific on the drums. I always ask, "Who's carrying this song?" If it's a twenty-five-year-old girl with a sweet voice, you can't expect me to smash the crash as if it was Chris Cornell singing. Maybe that ends up being what I do during a four-bar instrumental section. But when there's a voice and lyrics, how can you avoid them?

MD: How do you think about drum fills?

Nir: When it comes to fills, I try to come up with a theme so that when I introduce a fill into the first chorus, I'll play something with the same vibe going into the second chorus. Then maybe during the bridge I'll do something different to accent that scene change. But you have to listen to the phrasing of the vocals and the other instruments, especially the way they lead into new sections. You want to produce yourself in real time so that you can respond to things in ways that make sense with what's going on around you.

MD: If someone asks you to interact more with the vocal, how do you avoid sounding too busy?

Nir: Sometimes it happens quickly, and it's magical. And sometimes part of the process is to try different things, maybe to where you're overplaying, so that you can get to a point where you know where the magical moments are. You have to be objective. Even if you think you played something great, you have to be honest enough to say, "That's cool, but it takes away too much attention from the song."

But then some people want you to overplay. I was shocked when I toured with Little Steven—he *loves* drum fills. When I started rehearsing with him, he said, "I can tell you're a studio man. You have a lot of finesse and I love it, but when you play with this fifteen-piece band, you've got to really *play*." So it's an endless learning process with endless challenges.

MD: What's the biggest difference between playing live versus the studio?

Nir: You can get away with a lot more stuff live, but I don't think you can develop a sense of balance and awareness of your environment if you *only* play live. There's a big difference in the way I play in my studio versus the way I play in Ocean Way or Blackbird. My body responds differently to the environment. I'm not sure if most live guys are thinking like that, especially now that almost everyone is using in-ears. They usually just go up there and hit it.

MD: What do you feel are the strengths that make people want to hire you?

Nir: I would say it's my passion for music and my desire to play truly from my heart. I treat every session like it's my record. And I'll probably be the first one to tell you when something sucks. That's something you can pay the price for, but sometimes you gain more respect. But let's face it, I was born in Israel and lived in New York City for eighteen years. Nine years in Nashville won't change that. [laughs]

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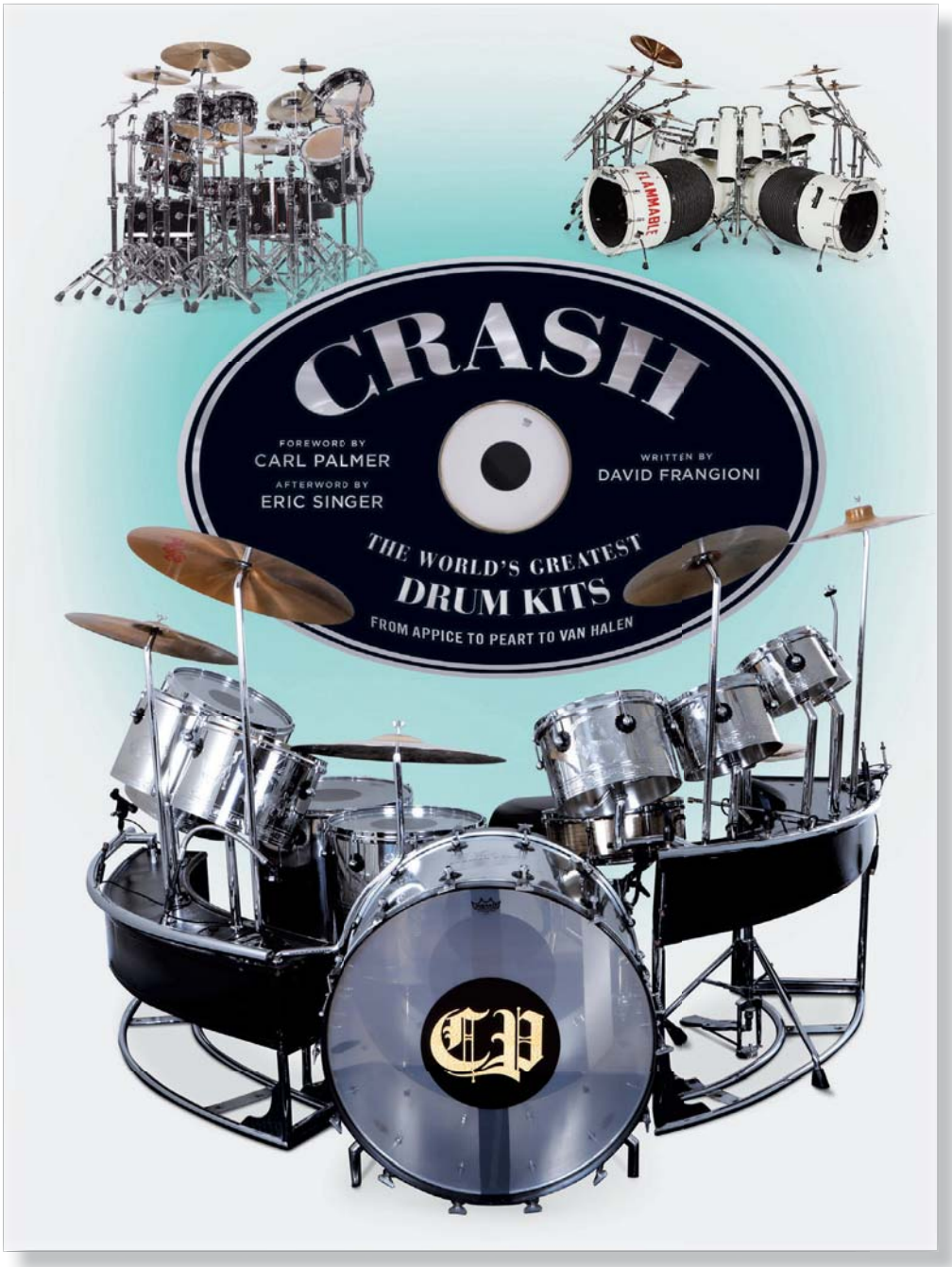

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Richard Spaven

Forging his own path into the future.

by Terry Branam

With roots in the U.K. club and hip-hop scenes, the drummer brings a fresh approach to the instrument that's at once modern and traditional.

Combining machine-like accuracy with jazz-influenced improvisational sensibilities, Richard Spaven's drumming has landed him gigs with vastly varied artists such the late Guru of the hip-hop duo Gang Starr, rapper Ty, producer/rapper Flying Lotus, electronica/jazz group the Cinematic Orchestra, jazz/hip-hop vocalist José James, and pop/soul/jazz singer Nailah Porter. Spaven's brilliance is evident beyond his world-class performance abilities; he's equally impressive in production and compositional territories. And most recently, the drummer released his fourth solo album, *Real Time*, which once again showcases his multifaceted talent.

Spaven's signature drum sound often sees him combine high-pitched, crisp snares; round, jazzy toms; and small, punchy bass drums. His cymbal choices are a sonic contrast of dry, lower-pitched hi-hats, rides, and crashes. Altogether, the drummer's tone could be described as a nod to the past while keeping an ear toward the future.

Much like his compositions, Spaven's drumming is elusive and genre-defying. He often avoids conventional downbeats and cadences in favor of sneaky syncopations and the types of sonic glitches you might hear from a deejay. No 16th note is left unturned within some of his drum 'n' bass–and dubstep–influenced explorations on tracks like "The Hidden Camera," a Photek cover found on Spaven's album *The Self*. Regardless of the artist he's working with, Richard's ideas and touch provide the ingredients to his trademark sound.

Let's dig into some highlights from Spaven's recent work, with commentary from the drummer himself.

Marcel Meier

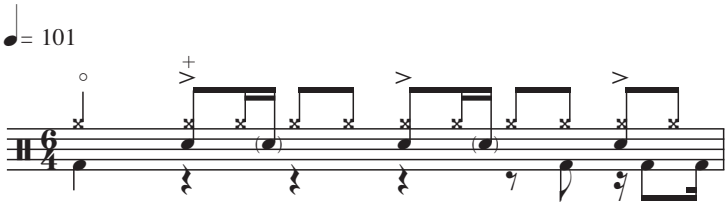
“1759 Outro” *Spaven’s 5ive* (Richard Spaven)

Richard’s drumming acts as the glue between the spacious Rhodes chords with some funky popcorn snare accents on the hypnotic “1759 Outro.” (0:45).

“My first record.... This has a techno-in-miniature vibe for me. It was a bonus or hidden track on the record and got picked up for the *Grand Theft Auto V* soundtrack. For me, it became my big hit.”

“Angel” *While You Were Sleeping* (José James)

The wobbly swing feel of Spaven’s groove on “Angel” sets a unique landscape for José James’ soulful vocals to flow over. Check out how the sparse bass drum part in the verse provides just the right amount of space for the lyrics to shine through.



“I’m really happy with the way this came out on the album—the hip-hop swing and the way it sits. But there are also elements of freedom.”

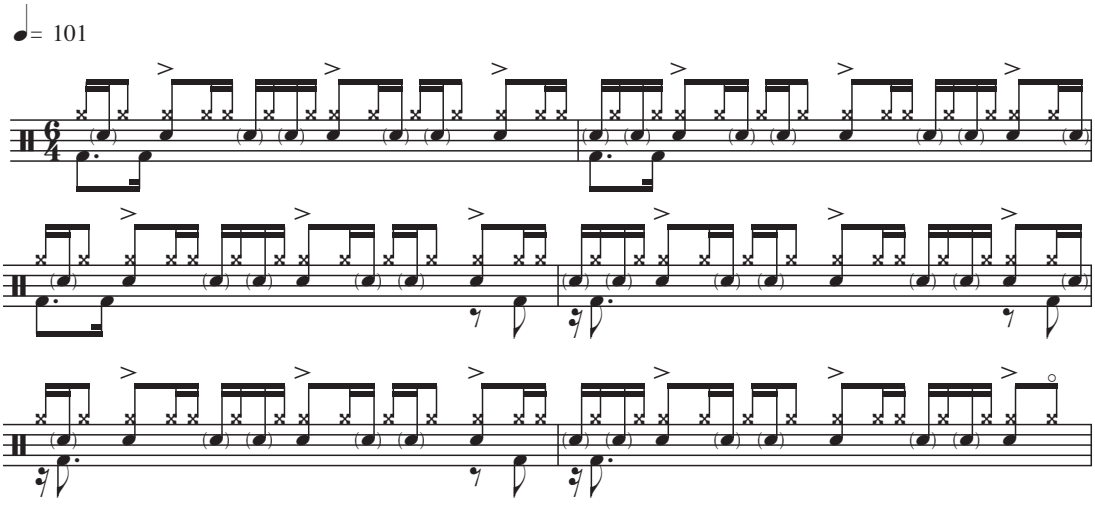
As the chorus kicks in, Spaven adds more bass drum notes into the pattern. The last two bars of the phrase allow the drums to open up and fill the space. The drummer bends the feel at will without losing his strong sense of pocket.

"North Star (featuring Sharlene Hector)"
City (Stuart McCallum)

On the Stuart McCallum penned "North Star," Spaven shows his tasteful creativity by crafting a cycling 4/4 hand pattern throughout the song's 6/4 time signature. This creates a compelling friction against the grain of the rhythm, adding an air of mystery to the song's vibe.

"I produced this record. Stuart plays guitar and co-writes on all my records. This groove starts off with the right hand playing the percussion part in 4/4 on top of the 6/4 groove, which makes it quite interesting."

The bass drum follows the guitar rhythm in the verse. Notice how the figures cleverly displace backward by an 8th note halfway through the six-bar phrase.



When the song reaches the chorus, the bass drum outlines the changing guitar and vocal rhythms while the hands continue playing the 4/4 pattern.

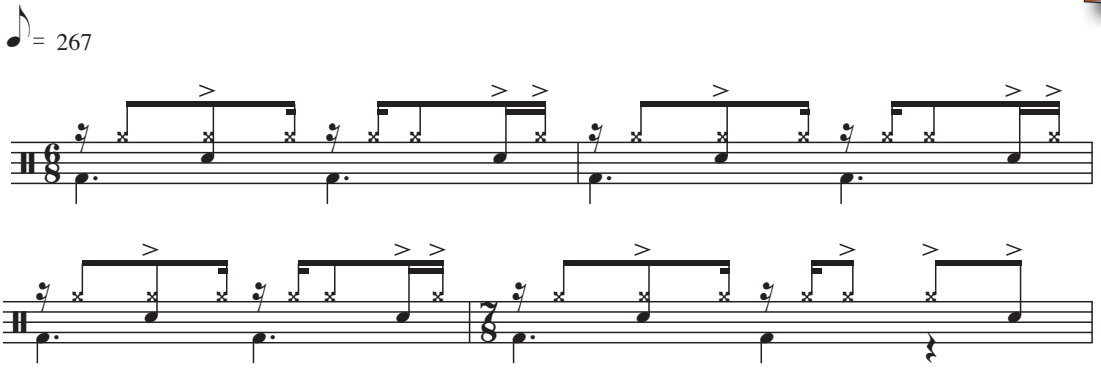
"Whole Other* (featuring The Hics)"
*Whole Other** (Richard Spaven)

This unique groove can be found on Spaven's song "Whole Other*" from the drummer's second release as a leader. The over-the-barline hi-hat phrasing between the first and second measure is evocative of a programmed delay effect, while the snare drum on beat 3 remains consistent.

"This beat has reference points, and I tried not to lock it down to being one thing. In drum 'n' bass terms we'd call this pattern a 'roller'—it keeps moving with a forward momentum."

"Toko (featuring Richard Spaven)"
Cloak (Jordan Rakei)

As a sideman, Spaven has a way of retaining his musical personality while not overstepping the bounds of what is necessary for the song. On Jordan Rakei's masterfully written "Toko," Spaven lays down a spiky 6/8 rhythm that weaves in and out of Rakei's stylized vocal phrasing. There's an extra beat added to the fourth measure of the phrase that makes this groove even more interesting.

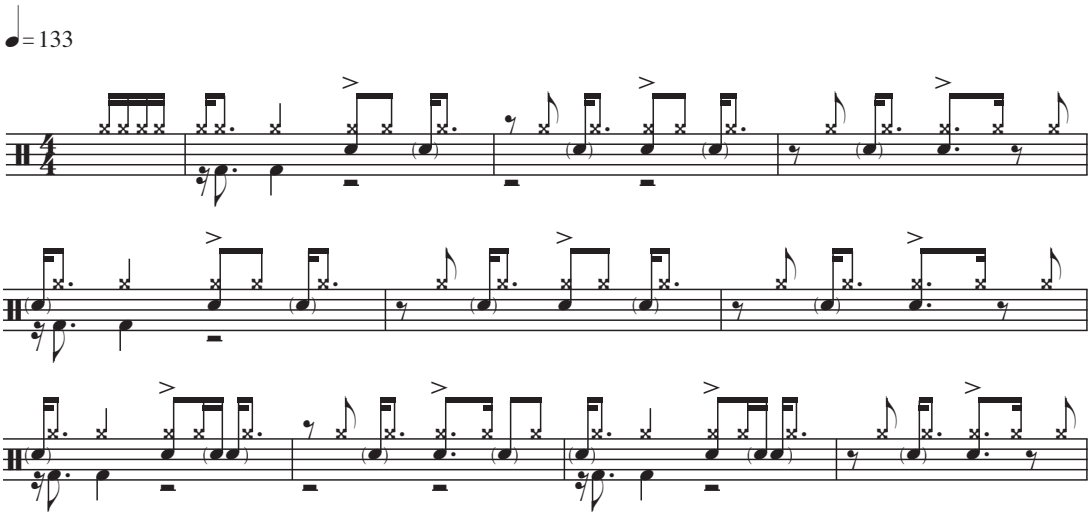


"What a tune by Jordan Rakei. I really tried to absorb the technical side of this so that it just becomes a good groove. The time signature is so internalized that an element of freedom comes with it. I would never count it. But it's that offbeat hi-hat pattern that makes it a special one—it stays off, but I'm playing it in a way to not make it a big deal. The idea was to make it continue grooving."

"The Self (featuring Jordan Rakei)"
The Self (Richard Spaven)

Another genius-level collaboration between Spaven and Rakei finds itself as the title track to Richard's third solo album. At first listen, the perception of the time can be misleading.

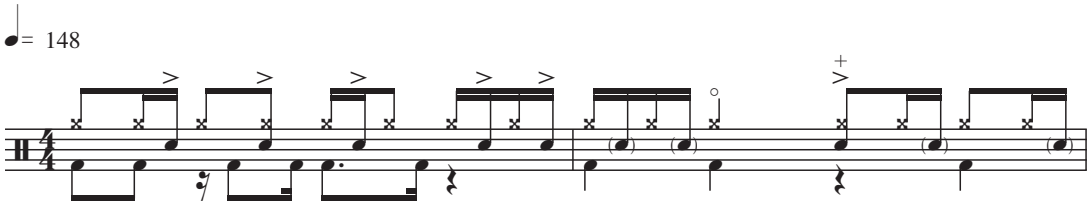
"The dotted quarters going across the beat at the end of each phrase is where this started out. Then I subtly filled in the rest. It's heavily influenced by dubstep, which I listen to a lot—133 bpm half-time goodness."



Jordan's mellow vocals float over the barlines while laser-sharp hi-hat syncopations slice up the subdivisions. The snare drum accent on beat 3 holds the time in place while the other elements fly around the stratosphere.

"Koln" *5ive* (the Sure Co.)

On the song "Koln" by the Sure Co., Richard serves up a rapid-fire half-time beat with some interesting interplay between the kick and snare. The groove is a great example of tension and release between the density of notes in the first measure and the open feel of the second measure. The following transcription reflects the pattern that Richard plays live.

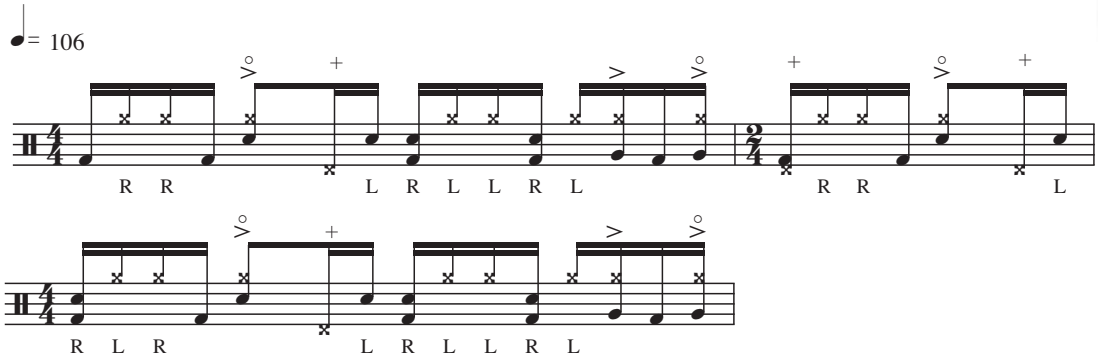


"Bit of a handful, this one. At speed it's pretty hard!"

"B-Line" (Richard Spaven)

The song "B-Line" features many a Spaven rhythmic device. Though it's not currently released, there are many recorded performances in circulation on the internet.

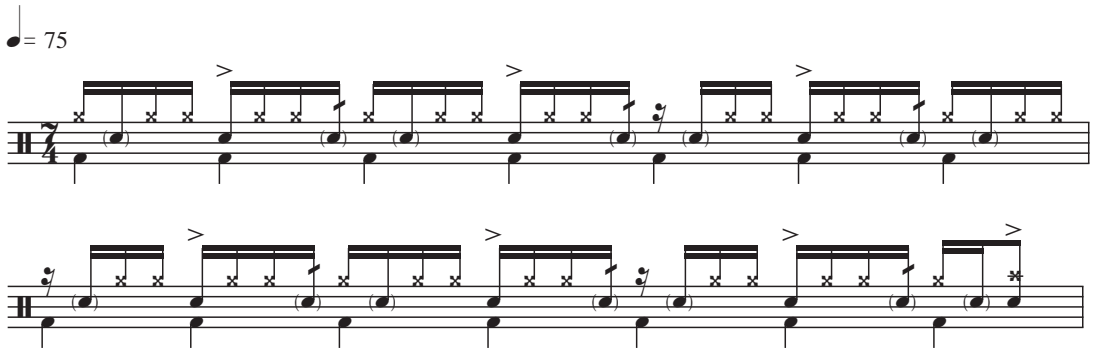
Richard takes an improvisational approach to his drumming on this piece, occasionally settling into this twisted beat. The hands switch from crossed to open positions to create a groovy pattern that flows through the repetitive vocal scat melody.



"I wrote this with singer Cleveland Watkiss. It's a vehicle for doing a drum solo—just a vibe to play over basically."

"Faded" *Real Time* (Richard Spaven featuring Jordan Rakei)

Spaven's artistry further develops on *Real Time*, which was recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios. Featuring the dream team of Jordan Rakei, Stuart McCallum on guitar, Robin Mullarkey on bass, and Oli Rockberger on keyboards, this album has a strong group-minded vision. One of the many standout tracks is the downtempo "Faded." Richard's repetitive drum pattern expertly sets the tone for this song.

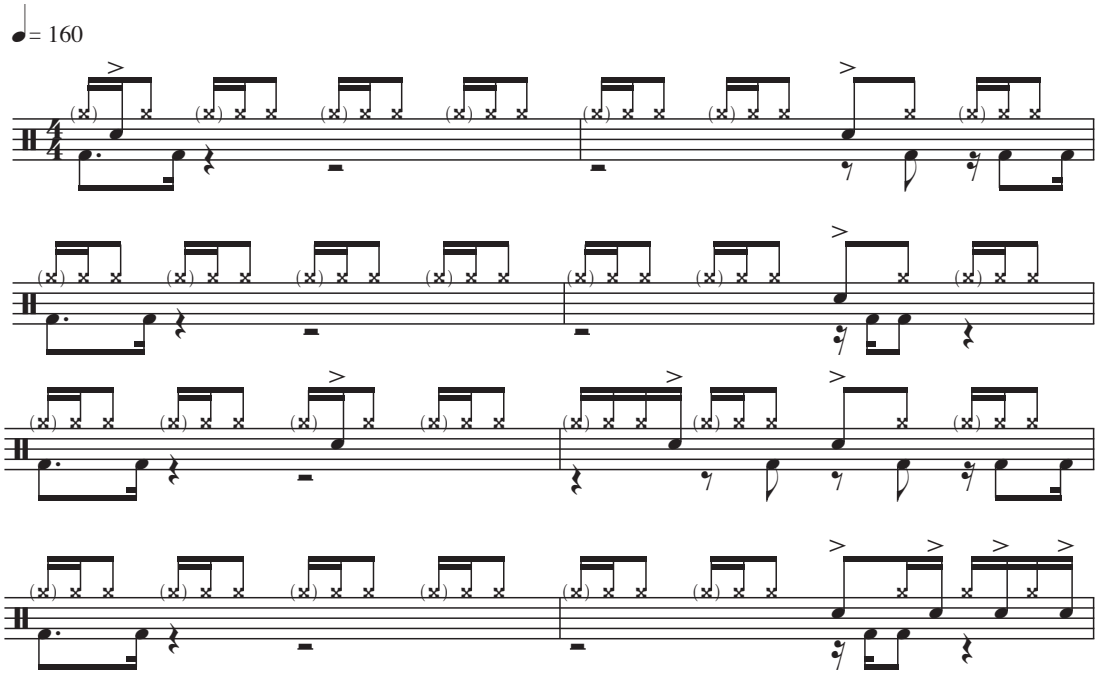


"This is a deep cut with Jordan Rakei from the new album. The whole tune is in 7/4 with only one bar of 7/8 at the end of the first chorus."

"Spin" *Real Time* (Richard Spaven)

"Spin"—perhaps his fieriest creation to date—provides an incredible display of Spaven's abilities. The hi-hat plays a static rhythm that sounds almost programmed in its speed and accuracy, while the snare and bass drum create a countermelody underneath. Richard throws in some unexpected accents that add to the excitement of the phrase. The execution of this pattern at tempo is astonishing.

"My favorite beat of all time. Gnarly!"



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Billie Eilish's Andrew Marshall

Learning Curve Ahead!

As one of only two musicians onstage with today's fastest-rising and most intriguing pop singer, the drummer is in his happy place, using all the stylistic and technological skills he's learned over the years to bracing effect.

Story by Martin Patmos

Photos by Alex Solca

Billie Eilish. Listen to the pop playlist in a restaurant or store, and you may hear her. Multiple songs have placed well in the charts, while her album, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*, debuted at number 1 in multiple countries. Fueled by a buzz built through artfully crafted videos for each song release on YouTube, Eilish has rapidly developed a rabid fanbase. With her image gracing the side of office buildings in major cities, she's a fully formed star talent in the pop world. Pretty impressive for a seventeen-year-old.

Featuring an understated vocal style, Eilish's songs, written with her brother Finneas O'Connell, come across as both moody and catchy. Developed in the studio, as their songs caught on they made the transition to the stage. Enter drummer Andrew Marshall, a bright, dedicated talent as comfortable with electronics as he is with acoustic drums.

Able to feed live drumming energy into electronic music seamlessly, Marshall never loses the intent of the songs as he highlights the talents of the artist he's backing. *MD* had a chance to catch up with the drummer just after he returned to L.A. following a string of concerts in Europe, and right before he was about to hit the road again.

MD: Billie Eilish has quickly made a name for herself.

Andrew: Yeah, it's really been amazing; she's growing really fast. We just keep going to new countries and people know her. Her audience skews younger, because she's seventeen, but I think she's on the rise.

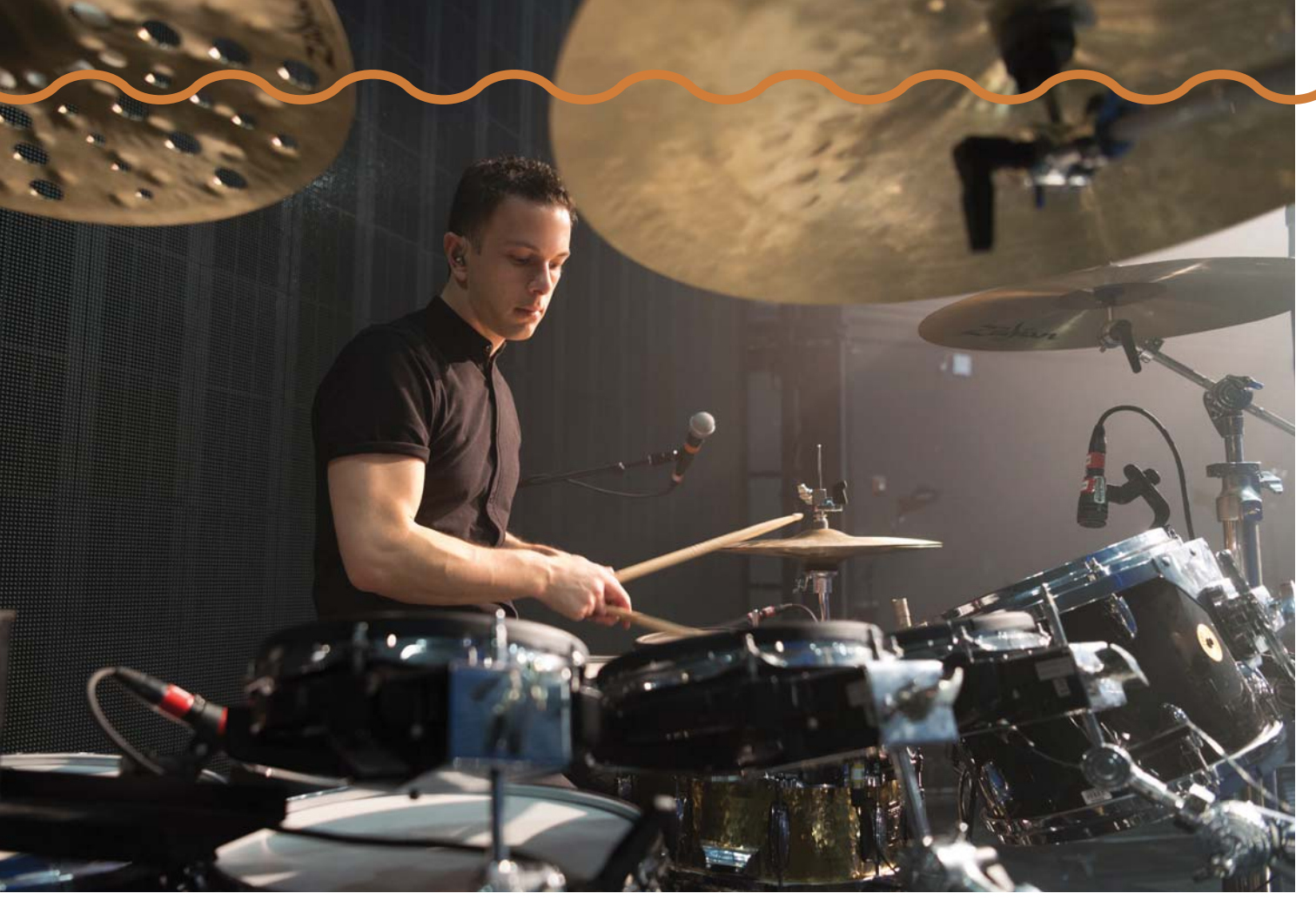
MD: What's that experience like for you?

Andrew: It's definitely wild. It requires a lot of work on everybody's part to keep up in terms of the technology and the stage show, and being up to speed for the places we're playing. It all feels really fast: one minute we were playing 300- to 500-capacity rooms, and just a year later it's amphitheaters and small arenas. I've certainly never experienced anything like it.

MD: Take us through how you got to this point. What's your background like?

Andrew: I grew up in New York and started playing when I was nine, taking drum lessons and playing in school band. I got into jazz in high school, as a lot of kids interested in music do. I thought I was totally going to become a jazzer. All my teachers and all the musicians I knew were jazz musicians at heart, even though some of them did other types of gigs.

Then I joined a pop-punk band. During high school I was developing a working drummer mentality, playing all kinds of gigs. So I joined this band and went to rehearsal, where they asked, "Can you play



the ride with the shank of the stick?" and said, "For the chorus here's the kick drum pattern, and open the hi-hat on the 'and' of 4 on the fourth bar." Up to that point, my whole musical experience was rooted in improvisation and different types of grooves, rather than drum parts. That opened me up to this whole rock and pop world of crafting drum parts to serve great songs. Those guys were awesome; that taught me a lot.

I then ended up going to college at Northwestern, originally in a dual-degree jazz/liberal arts program, but ended up not doing the music degree and graduating with an English degree instead.

By that time I was re-imagining myself and had discovered what the modern pop drummer is. I would look at artists like Taylor Swift or the Weeknd, and while I knew there were bands and musicians hired to play with those people, I didn't know anybody who

Marshall's Setup

Drums: Gretsch USA Custom
A. 6.5x14 chrome over brass snare (shown: 6.5x14 hammered brass)
B. 6.5x14 wood side snare
C. 8x12 tom
D. 14x14 floor tom
E. 16x16 floor tom
F. 14x22 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian
1. 15" K Sweet hi-hats
2. 20" K Sweet crash [shown: Cluster crash]
3. 22" K Light ride
4. 19" K Special Dry trash crash

Electronics
aa: Roland PD-85BK pads (3)
bb: Roland PD-8 pad
cc: Roland KT-10 pedal
dd: Roland RT-30HR trigger
ee: Roland RT-30K trigger
ff: iConnectivity iConnectMIDI4+ interface
gg: Roland TM-6 Pro trigger module
hh: Roland TM-2 trigger module
not shown: PlayAUDIO12 interface

Heads: Remo Controlled Sound Coated Black Dot main snare batter, Emperor Coated tom and side snare batters, Ambassador Clear tom resonants, Powerstroke P3 Coated bass drum batter

Hardware: DW, including 9000 series rack system, 5000 series two-leg hi-hat stand (shown: 3000 series), 9000 series double bass drum pedal and snare stands; Porter & Davies BC2 (shown) or TT6 throne

Sticks: Vater 1A wood-tip sticks, T4 mallets, Heavy Wire brushes

Percussion: Big Fat Snare Drum White Copper Bling Ring, Rhythm Tech Studio Shaker

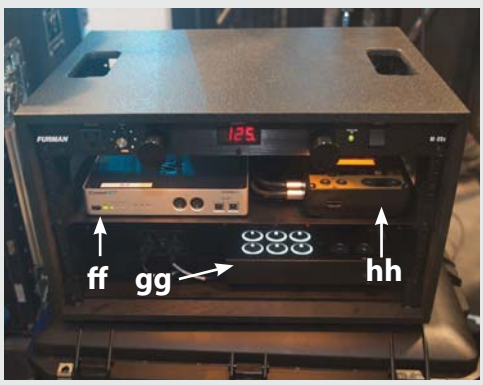
Accessories: Big Fat Snare Drum Donut-XL, 64 Audio A8 in-ear monitors

> "He's so easy to work with and dedicated. He works so hard, and I don't think he's ever made a mistake."
>
> —Billie Eilish

did that. I didn't really understand what that whole world was about. Discovering those players and researching it more, I decided *that's* what I wanted to do.

So I started checking out all this pop music and getting into electronics. Along the way I played a ton of musical theater, did marching band drumline, was in a Stomp-like percussion group—I became a sponge, just trying to play as much as I could, learn as much as I could about music and drumming, and soak up all kinds of music experiences.

After college I went back to New York for three years. There I tried to play all the time, with anybody who asked. Whether it was musical theater, rock, songwriter gigs, a wedding band or cover band, it didn't matter. And then I started to get calls for some small tours, which snowballed until I was spending half the year or more on the road.



Hybridizing

Andrew Marshall on Incorporating Electronics into Your Rig

Much of today's music requires drummers to combine acoustic drums with electronic elements like pads, triggers, modules that store sounds and transmit MIDI, and all-in-one devices such as the Roland SPD-SX. Electronics are nothing new in the drumming world—we all know and love those big hexagonal Simmons pads from back in the day. But now more than ever before, working drummers will find that knowledge of this subject is a key to success not only in pop music but in other genres as well. Even country artists are running playback rigs nowadays!

Using an SPD-SX to store and play samples is a great way to introduce electronic elements into the drumkit. Not often discussed, however, is how integrating Ableton Live into an electronic hybrid setup can open the door to a massive dose of creativity, flexibility, and, of course, employment.

Ableton's built-in drum rack device is a way to store sounds and trigger them from any MIDI-equipped drum module. Drum racks are groups of slots where samples can go. Drag and drop a sound onto a drum rack pad, program your module to send the MIDI note assigned to that pad, and the pad on your kit will play the sound. This allows for a lot of flexibility—samples can be moved around between pads quickly and easily; levels, crop points, velocity response, and other settings can be adjusted in the drum rack window; and effects like filters and EQ can be added to individual samples or the entire kit. You can also drag multiple sounds onto a single pad to layer them.

Ableton's drum rack device. The sounds are laid out like you might program an SPD-SX to control a drum rack, with a 3x3 square that mimics the physical pads. The selected sound's waveform is displayed in the window along with some controls that can be edited.

There's another device in Ableton called an instrument rack, which is exactly what it sounds like—a group of MIDI instruments. Ableton calls these instruments chains, because each one can actually be a long chain with effects and multiple MIDI devices. For the purposes of this article, each chain will just contain one drum sample.

Instrument racks can be extremely useful when many samples need to be played within the same song. Instead of dragging a sample onto a drum rack pad, drag an instrument rack onto it, and load some samples into the instrument rack. This way, one pad can be used to play different sounds at different times.

Using the instrument rack's chain selector feature, you can cycle through the samples in the instrument rack, and the pad will play whichever sample is selected. If you're playing to backing tracks, you can automate the chain selector to choose for you whichever sample you need at a given time in the song. In many modern pop and electronic settings, a single song might have ten or more samples the drummer needs to play. Using chain selector automation to change the samples on the pads for different sections allows you to cover everything you have to cover within a song without needing a pad for every sample.

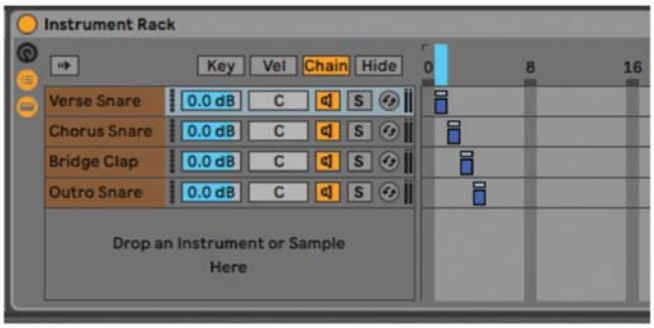
This works the other way, too: load multiple drum racks into an instrument rack, and you can move the instrument rack's chain selector to change the entire kit at once. This is useful when each song in the show has its own set of sounds. Assign drum racks in an instrument rack to the songs, automate the chain selector to choose the correct drum rack for each song, and when a track starts playing, the sounds appear on your pads.

When you're running Ableton for your drum sounds, minimizing the processing load on the computer is key to avoiding issues with the playback session's performance. Automation can again be used here: to reduce the impact of your drum racks and the samples within them on the computer's CPU, automate each drum rack's on/off button to the "on" position only during the correct song so that devices don't waste valuable processing power when not in use. It's worth noting that drum racks and short drum samples are pretty light on CPU load in general, especially on newer computers. Still, it's good practice to disable all MIDI devices when they're not needed, particularly when they include third-party plugins.

A note of caution: triggers can be used to play drum rack and instrument rack samples in this way, but they often create more latency than pads do. ApTrigga3 is a useful plugin that bypasses the MIDI and greatly cuts down on latency. You can always use triggers with sounds stored in the module as well, of course, and setting up triggers this way is usually relatively low-latency. If you have a module like the Roland TM-6 Pro that can send both MIDI and audio, then you can send the pads into Ableton via MIDI and have the triggers play the module's onboard sounds simultaneously.

Finally, it's important to keep in mind that the goal of these tools should always be to serve the music. If you're an experimental electronic drummer, perhaps with a solo project or a band, then feel free to go wild. Get nerdy for the sake of it, and make your setup and Ableton session as complex as you want. But if you're a hired gun playing with an artist, make sure you're always keeping their needs and those of the music at the forefront. Your ears are the greatest tool of all—let the music tell you when the samples are best and when the acoustic drums are a better choice. Sometimes sounds that work well on the recording don't work as well live, and it's up to you to always be listening to the overall sound of the band to ensure that what you're playing is supporting the music.

Hybrid acoustic/electronic setups can allow drummers to remain loyal to the artist's vision by reproducing trademark sounds from the recordings while augmenting them with the power of live drums. The result for audiences is a show that delivers the songs they know and love in a way that translates to an exciting concert experience. Happy drumming, and make sure you've got plenty of coffee on hand for those inevitable late-night programming sessions!



An instrument rack. Each sample is assigned its own "chain," and the chain selector (in blue at the top) can be moved to select any of the samples in the list. This instrument rack shows "Verse Snare" selected.

For more information on this subject, check out Daniel Mintseris's excellent course on Lynda.com, "Performing with Ableton Live: On Stage with St. Vincent." He discusses these and other methods for using Ableton in the live environment in great detail, and I am indebted to him for much of the information presented here.

At that point I saw the writing on the wall: all the players I admire live in L.A. That was where I had to go. So I moved out there and started working with Billie three or four months later.

MD: How did that come about?

Andrew: A musical director friend who knew their management connected us. It was fairly early on in Billie's touring career. She had put out several songs, and the EP *Don't Smile at Me* was out for about six months at that point, but she'd only done one proper headlining tour and some press trips before that. Basically it was all still pretty new. So the time had come to add a drummer to the live show, and my name was put in the hat. I did the audition, and a few days later they called to tell me I had the gig. Three weeks later we were on a plane to Singapore to play the 2018 Laneway Festival.

MD: That's an interesting background, with your focus on the working pop drummer field. It seems like there are some different requirements, and it's different from forming a band, getting a break, and so forth.

Andrew: Yeah, that's true. When I realized that this was a thing and became inspired by it, there was an *Oh, shit!* moment, because it's a hard thing to try to do. But at the same time, getting a break as a band is just as hard. For me, though, I just thought, *I've got to try it*, because I was just so interested in the setups, the playing, and the whole lifestyle. I found it mesmerizing.

And that focus helped me. In the beginning the goal was just to work as a drummer, no matter the gig or situation. I've found that having a focus beyond that moved me faster; it drove me. Yet there was so much I had to learn to do this. I tried to embody the whole persona: coming into situations knowing the songs, valuing the song, understanding song structure, having instincts for pop situations, and playing for the song while honoring the parts from the production. I ended up becoming that and bringing those things to each situation through a natural evolution. And I love it; I love working out the drum parts, the shows, the lifestyle, everything. At the same time, I'm not only a pop guy. I love all kinds of music and situations.

MD: Are there any particular influences for you as a drummer?

Andrew: Steve Gadd is for sure the biggest one. I've been lucky enough to see him play a few times in different situations. Jeff Porcaro is another huge one. And Steve Jordan. Aaron Sterling is one now.

But I must point out Brendan Buckley, because to me he is the quintessential modern pop touring drummer. He was one of the first people I discovered who does this, and it blew me away. You couldn't ask for a more supportive drummer. Brendan plays the part, exactly what has to be there—nothing more, nothing less. He's a wizard with electronics. And he knows how to fit into different situations. He's a huge influence.

MD: Playing with Billie involves a lot of electronics, and you play a hybrid kit. What got you into that?

Andrew: There are two factors that led to that: the musical and the professional. The musical side is that I got into electronic music. I was listening to Aphex Twin, Squarepusher, and electronic songwriters like Björk and James Blake. I then researched how that music was done live and how drummers were involved. So there was a musical interest.

On the professional side, when I started looking at what pop drummers did and what their setups looked like, there were always pads and triggers. When I read through *Modern Drummer* and looked at whoever's setup, there were always pictures including SPDs and laptops. I realized that if I wanted to do this career path, I would have to be hip to all this stuff because it's on almost every single pop gig. Learning it could only help.

So I bought an SPD-SX and started learning how to program, and how to load and play different sounds. Eventually I played in some situations where that was needed. In New York I then started having more gigs involving electronics, using Ableton and routing click and tracks to the in-ears, or using an SPD-SX and pads. Everything built on itself, so every successive gig I would learn something more.

At this point with Billie, her music is very electronic, so all of this became beneficial. I still play plenty of real drums, but it's super

"Andrew brings a level of discipline to our show that is unparalleled. His skill and professionalism are so consistent and reliable, it's hard to believe he's an actual human musician. That being said, the life he brings to our songs is so full of energy and power, he's made our shows and songs infinitely more exciting and compelling. We couldn't be luckier to have him playing with us."—Finneas O'Connell

hybrid: in order to do justice to the songs and production, I have to integrate all the electronics into the setup.

MD: The sound palette you have with her is very interesting. There are electronic sounds and acoustic sounds, and you create a seamless blend when playing live. How do you make everything gel smoothly?

Andrew: Well, that's the goal, and there's a number of factors that go into that. Billie's music is super diverse. There are electronic ballads, hip-hop bangers, trap hi-hat, shuffle—it runs the gamut. But all the songs have to gel. What's important is figuring out a way to make it all work and make the set run smoothly.

The first thing I do when I get new music from her is pull the sounds and figure out how to orchestrate them around the kit. Sometimes I'm sent drum samples, but when I'm working from the stems I'll start chopping out all the drum sounds that could be played. My goal is to remain true to the production and recording of the song, to retain any signature elements, but also to bring some live energy to it.

Then I'll orchestrate the samples around the kit by playing through the songs. I need to feel out which parts are more drumset oriented, which ones are more sample oriented, and which are hybrid. A lot of times I'll end up playing an actual drum or cymbal with one limb and a pad with another.

All of those decisions just come from what the music is telling me. If it's a super high-energy chorus, I'd probably go to the kit for that, because live that will translate better than the pads. Sometimes that's not true, though. If the snare drum in the chorus is a bottle sound or a door slamming, you can't really replace that with a snare unless that's what the artist wants. So all those decisions go into it. Plus the live set goes through different iterations in rehearsal, and there are discussions with the musical director and artists.

In the case of Billie, the only other person in the band is her brother Finneas, who produces all her stuff and co-writes with her. We all discuss it and try to come up with parts that will work really well live. Then there's time spent leveling out the samples and making sure they're hitting hard, so that everything sounds seamless.

The other factor is that your engineers play a huge role in getting the samples to sound good and hit as hard as the real drums. We're lucky with Billie to have engineers that really understand that. They see me playing a pad and understand it's not a background sound; it might be the snare sound for the chorus, so it's *got* to be slamming.

MD: For sample sounds like doors slamming and bottles, are those from Billie or are they yours?

Andrew: Mostly the sounds come directly from her albums. Ninety percent of the time that's what I'll use, and that's the approach I've taken with other artists, too. There have been occasions where I've used my own sample libraries, especially early on when I was playing with artists who just wanted an electronic kick or snap. Then I'd find a good sound for them and level it.

Sometimes an artist will want to do something different live that might require a different sample, like if there's a live intro that hasn't been recorded, and then I might have to find some other samples. But most of the time they're coming directly from the recordings.

MD: Are there any differences in your technique for playing electronics as opposed to drums?

Andrew: I try to get everything feeling as close to a drum as possible, but it also depends on the sample. Sometimes a sample is just a sound with one dynamic level no matter how hard you hit it, while other times it's a dynamic sample. I customize the pads

to make it sound right and make sure it feels good to play.

MD: What about dynamics? Billie's delivery can be quiet at times, so how does that affect you?

Andrew: That's an area where the electronics help. Of course when I'm playing on pads it's easier for the engineer to mix with her voice, but it's a combination of things. Even being aware of where she is onstage matters. If she's close to me and I hear the drums from her vocal mic in my ears, I'll back off. And that's just instinctual. It's a delicate balance, though. She is quiet, but she also likes the shows to be really rowdy. And the crowds are super wild. So I do have to slam a bit and bring that energy to certain parts, while still being sensitive to her voice having to be the loudest thing. There's a lot of push and pull.

MD: Stylistically Billie draws on a lot of feels, from the dark shuffle of "Bury a Friend" to the lively electronics of "You Should See Me in a Crown." What sort of preparation goes into your approach?

Andrew: This gig is really interesting because I came from listening to and checking out a million things my whole life. From jazz to pop-punk to electronic music…. I played in a funk band, and was into metal at one point, and I had those musical theater experiences. So with Billie, even though the songs are hers and Finneas's, all the different feels and grooves are things I'm familiar with.

MD: It's an accumulated knowledge.

Andrew: Right. And of course there are things I'll have to practice to make them feel good. But I love getting to play all those different feels. If you look at my drumkit for Billie, there are acoustic drums, a double kick pedal, a bunch of pads, brushes and mallets…. So it's very diverse and musical, and I can really go in any direction with that kit. It's super fun and a great challenge.

MD: In preparing for live performance, what sort of warm-up do you do? How do you get in the zone?

Andrew: I like to do yoga a lot, and I try to get in a yoga class on a show day. That's really great for me. Right before the show I do this thing called progressive muscle relaxation, where you contract every muscle individually and relax it, to release the tension.

Basically the name of the game in drumming, as a physical thing, is avoiding tension. You want to be as relaxed as you possibly can be. These are things that help me really tune in to relaxing my entire body so that when I'm playing stuff that's fast or technical, it's just smooth. Then to warm up for the stage I'll do jumping jacks or skip rope.

It is just so important to get out of the mind and into the body, because that helps me play better. The Kenny Werner book *Effortless Mastery* says the master is within us all, and you just have to access it. You have to enter the flow state, and relaxation exercises help to get me there.

MD: That process really shows an awareness of mind, body, and connection to the instrument. Most drummers don't talk about this much, although Derek Roddy comes to mind as someone speaking about similar things.

Andrew: I have a ton of respect for Derek Roddy. To have the speed to play death metal, you have to be more relaxed than anyone! Those techniques have been huge for me, especially when it comes to dealing with such a hectic schedule and relatively high-pressure playing situations.

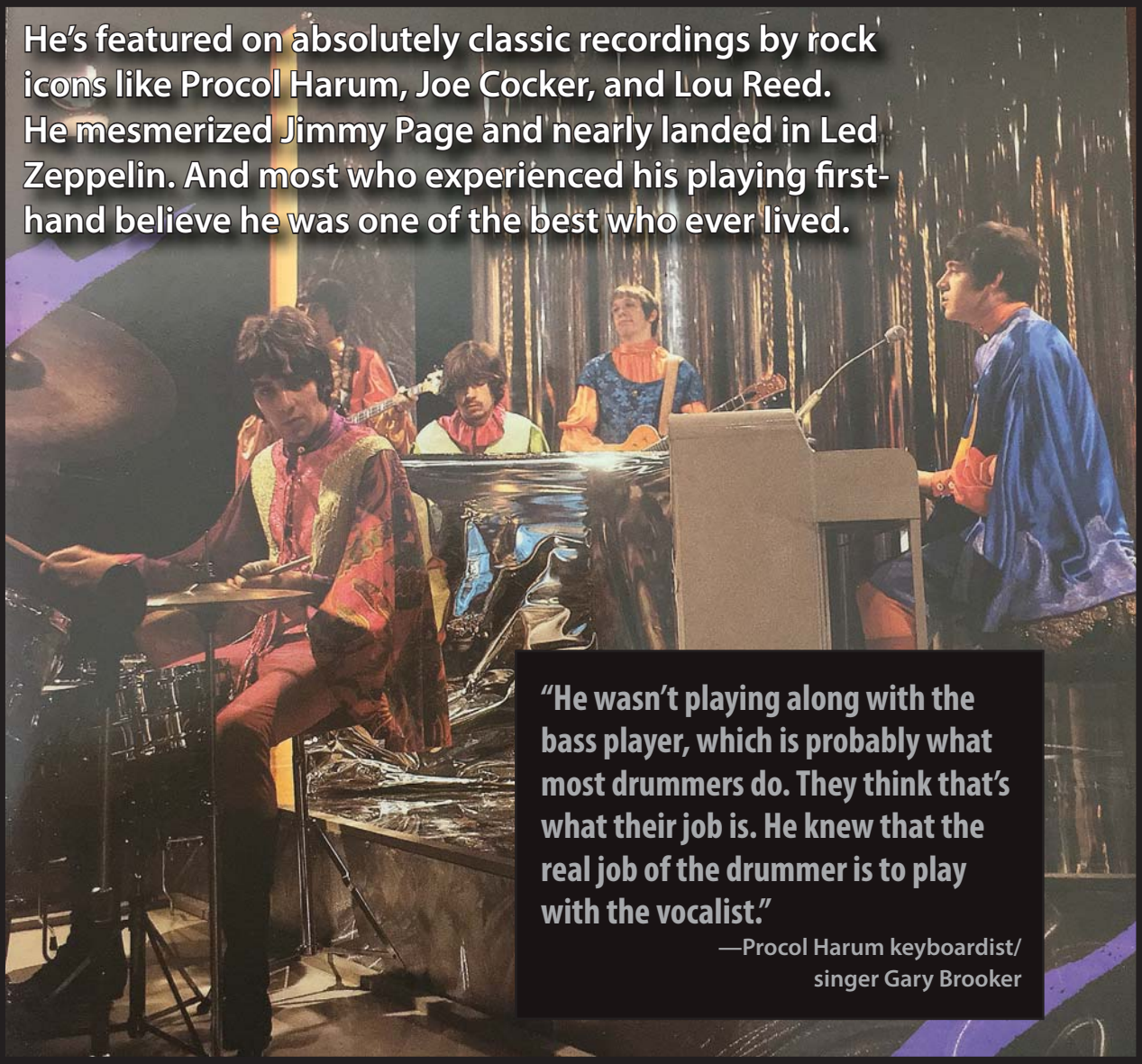
MD: Now that Billie's LP is out, what are the next steps for you?

Andrew: First, rehearsal. Then some shows and television spots before we're out on the road. There are some European festivals and then more concerts. We'll be out for a good while!

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT...?

B. J. Wilson

by Patrick Berkery



He's featured on absolutely classic recordings by rock icons like Procol Harum, Joe Cocker, and Lou Reed. He mesmerized Jimmy Page and nearly landed in Led Zeppelin. And most who experienced his playing first-hand believe he was one of the best who ever lived.

"He wasn't playing along with the bass player, which is probably what most drummers do. They think that's what their job is. He knew that the real job of the drummer is to play with the vocalist."

—Procol Harum keyboardist/ singer Gary Brooker

Had Procol Harum enjoyed greater commercial success during its original run between the late '60s and mid '70s, you'd likely hear B. J. Wilson's name mentioned more frequently alongside those of John Bonham, Keith Moon, Ian Paice, Carmine Appice, and Cozy Powell in discussions regarding great rock drummers of the era. He was a star-caliber talent.

Visually, Wilson (born Barrie James Wilson in London on March 18, 1947) was a compelling presence. Once described as looking like an octopus in a bathtub behind the drums, he regularly sat so low that his snare drum was at diaphragm level, forcing him to fully extend his arms to reach the toms and cymbals, all the while playing traditional grip.

"Everybody else looked weird to me!" exclaims Procol Harum singer/keyboardist Gary Brooker when asked about his former

The shot at left, which appears in the LP *Procol Harum: The Collection*, shows B. J. Wilson sitting up fairly high, with his snare tilted away from him. In subsequent years he tilted it flatter and sat much lower, to a point well beyond what would look comfortable for most players.

At right, Procol Harum circa 1972: organist Chris Copping, B. J. Wilson, singer/pianist Gary Brooker, lyricist Keith Reid, guitarist Dave Ball, and bassist Alan Cartwright

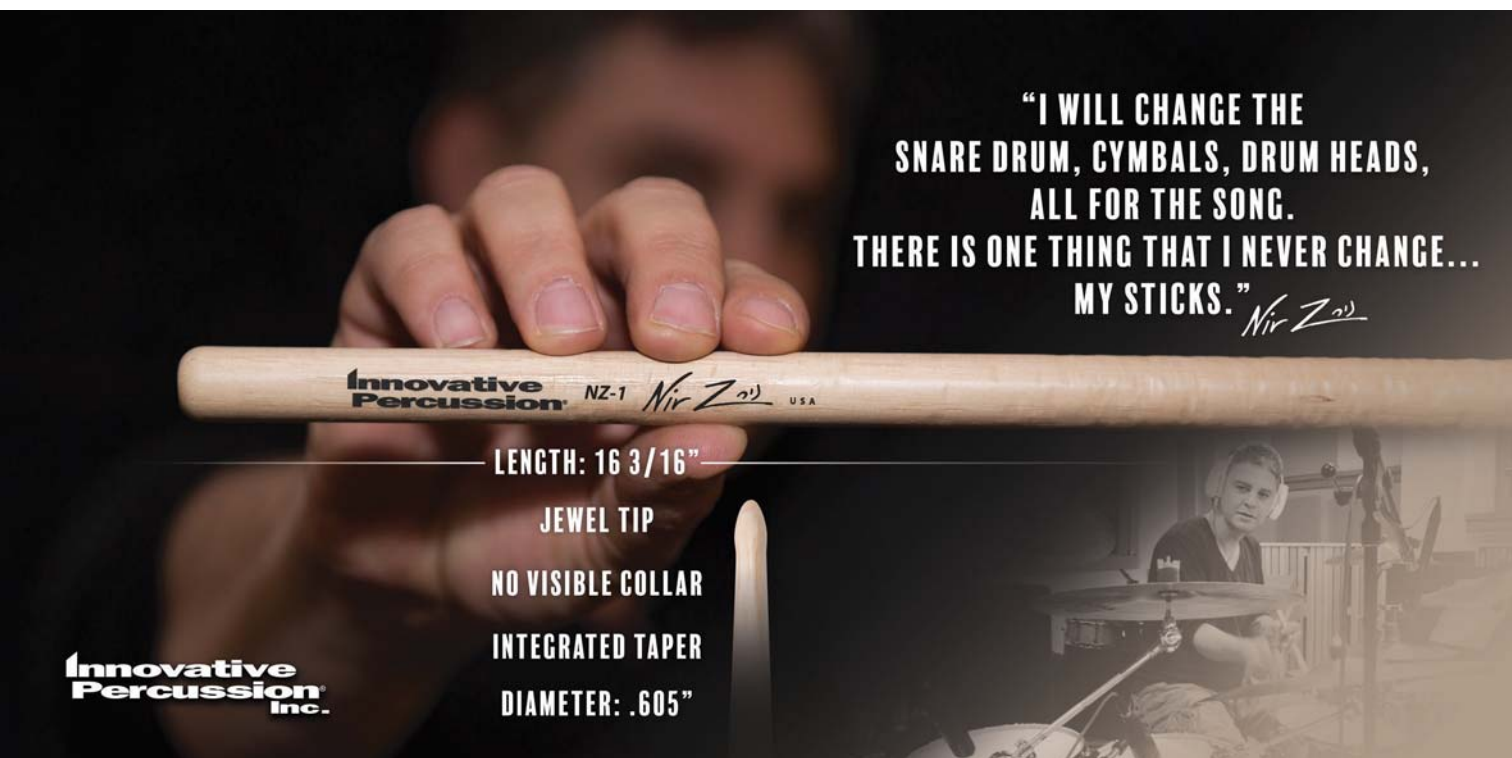
drummer's rather unique ergonomics. "He was always fascinating to watch. There are a few DVDs around where you get a good look, but never enough as far as I'm concerned. He's totally captivating."

Sonically, Wilson was an absolute force of nature. Comb through Procol Harum's catalog, and you'll discover no shortage of tracks with drumming that will leave you collecting your jaw from the floor.

For sheer excitement, there's "Simple Sister," essentially a spastic drum solo set to halting, orchestral hard rock. The seafaring ballad "A Salty Dog" finds Wilson flashing more nuanced chops, with his jazzy flourishes, marching patterns, and majestic fills.

The grinding "Long Gone Geek" and the cowbell-rattling "Whiskey Train" show Wilson had a pocket as deep as the best of them. "Conquistador"—both in its studio and live versions—finds Wilson at perhaps his most dramatic and driving, delivering fills that command attention. And stately ballads like "Homburg" showed Wilson also excelled at keeping simple time with tons of feel.

We haven't highlighted the understated



swing and those tumbling rolls from Procol Harum's signature song, "A Whiter Shade of Pale," because Wilson isn't on it. Neither is the band's briefly tenured original drummer, Bobby Harrison. It's actually session drummer Bill Eyden who got to play on "Pale," a result of the urging of producer Denny Cordell.

Had Wilson exercised some patience, it could have been him playing drums on one of the most recognizable songs of all time. He was meant to be the drummer in this new band started by Brooker, with whom he previously played in a blues band called the Paramounts. But as Brooker and lyricist Keith Reid were trying to assemble Procol Harum in fits and starts in early 1967, Wilson bailed and rejoined another former band, George Bean and the Runners. By that year's famed Summer of Love, it was Procol Harum, not George Bean and the Runners, enjoying massive international success. Before long, Wilson would be back with Brooker in the band he left before it ever got started. "Once 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' became number one, B. J. saw that he should join—and did," Brooker says with a laugh.

Though Wilson missed out on one iconic classic rock song, he did wind up on another about a year later. That's him swinging hard on Joe Cocker's soul-powered version of the Beatles' "With a Little Help from My Friends," a cover that arguably eclipses the original thanks in part to Wilson's performance. Every element is extraordinary, from his 6/4 feel, to the raw power and boundless imagination behind his fills, to the dynamic sensitivity he employs in playing off Cocker's stirring vocal. Brooker cites the track as a perfect example of the swing inherent to Wilson's style ("His work across 6/4 would never be matched by anybody"), marveling fifty years later at the snare flam and kick combination Wilson uses to bring the band back in after the hushed first verse.

"That drum intro is absolutely killer," Brooker says enthusiastically. "I wasn't there, but I can imagine that somebody said, 'Let's leave the drums out; you just come in when the chorus comes.' And he likely said, 'Okay…here I come.' [laughs] It's one of those master-class drum fills that's filled with courage and imagination and belief. You've got to believe in yourself to come in like that."

Brooker's not the only world-class musician left amazed after working up-close with Wilson. Jimmy Page, who played guitar on "With a Little Help from My Friends" prior to forming Led Zeppelin, gave Wilson this endorsement in the biography *Procol Harum: The Ghosts of a Whiter Shade of Pale*: "There was nobody to touch him. He almost orchestrated with his drumming…with his uniqueness on the kit. And that's what he had. He was very special indeed. There was nobody in the world that could drum like B.J. Wilson."

Page was believed to be so impressed with Wilson that he wanted him for Zeppelin, but reportedly changed course when Robert Plant presented John Bonham. While it's interesting to ponder how Zeppelin would have sounded with Wilson on drums, the rock world certainly didn't get cheated out of a monster drummer by Wilson landing elsewhere. Just as Wilson was hardly your average rock drummer, Procol Harum was hardly your average circa late '60s/early '70s rock band. They eschewed the heavily amplified blues and endless jams of the day, building songs instead around classically tinged piano, swelling B3 organ, strings, and

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Brooker's powerful delivery of Reid's lyrics.

Wilson and Procol Harum seemed a perfect match. The band's atypical rock ethos afforded Wilson the opportunity to use every tool in his toolkit. And the songs benefitted from having a drummer who applied a somewhat jazzier approach (which Brooker says was enhanced by lessons Wilson took with Joe Morello) and had a knack for playing off the vocal melody rather than locking in with the bassist.

"He was very inspirational to me as a singer," Brooker says. "He knew every word to every song. You'd look out the corner of your eye, and he'd be singing the third verse. He interpreted, in a very subtle way, the lyrical content. He was always listening. I could see in his face that's what he was playing along to: the lyrics. He wasn't playing along with the bass player, which is probably what most drummers do. They think that's what their job is. He knew that the real job of the drummer is to play with the vocalist."

Other artists took notice of Wilson and sought him out during his stint with Procol Harum (he notably played on Lou Reed's *Berlin* album and the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* soundtrack) and after the band disbanded in 1977. Wilson joined Cocker's backing band in the late '70s, and was brought in to play on sessions for Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' *Damn the Torpedoes* and AC/DC's *Flick of the Switch*, though his tracks didn't make the final cut on either album. Wilson played with Cocker until 1983, when he was let go due to his alcohol abuse problems.

Wilson would play on Brooker's 1985 solo album, *Echoes in the Night,* and had attempted to make a new start in the U.S., living in Eugene, Oregon, with his wife and children, but substance abuse cut him down in his prime. He overdosed in a reported suicide attempt in 1987, and remained in a coma in a vegetative state until he ultimately died from pneumonia in October 1990.

Brooker formed a new version of Procol Harum after Wilson's overdose and held out hope his former bandmate would awake from his coma and return to the band. He would regularly visit Wilson and play him demos, hoping it might somehow miraculously rouse the drummer.

"I tried to wake him up," Brooker says. "I played different things to him. I'd sing to him. We were working on new songs using a drum machine. I'd play him the tracks with the drum machine, hoping he would hear it and go, 'What the bloody hell is going on? I've got to get over there.'"

The album Procol Harum was working on at the time, *The Prodigal Stranger*, would be released in 1991, dedicated to Wilson. Brooker has kept the band going ever since, using a series of very capable drummers including Mark Brzezicki and Geoff Dunn (who appears on the band's most recent album, 2017's *Novum*), but the spectre of Wilson still looms large.

"Sometimes I do think, *I wish he was here*, but that isn't fair to whoever is [on the drums], is it?" Brooker says with a laugh. "Now and again drummers come up to me and say what all drummers should say: 'B. J. Wilson was one of the best ever.' Jim Keltner said that to me when we were doing the [2002 George Harrison tribute] Concert for George. It's the first thing he said to me. He didn't say, 'Hello, Gary.' He walked up to me and said, 'B. J. Wilson was the man.' I'm glad somebody feels like that. Especially a drummer of his capabilities. That's nice to know."

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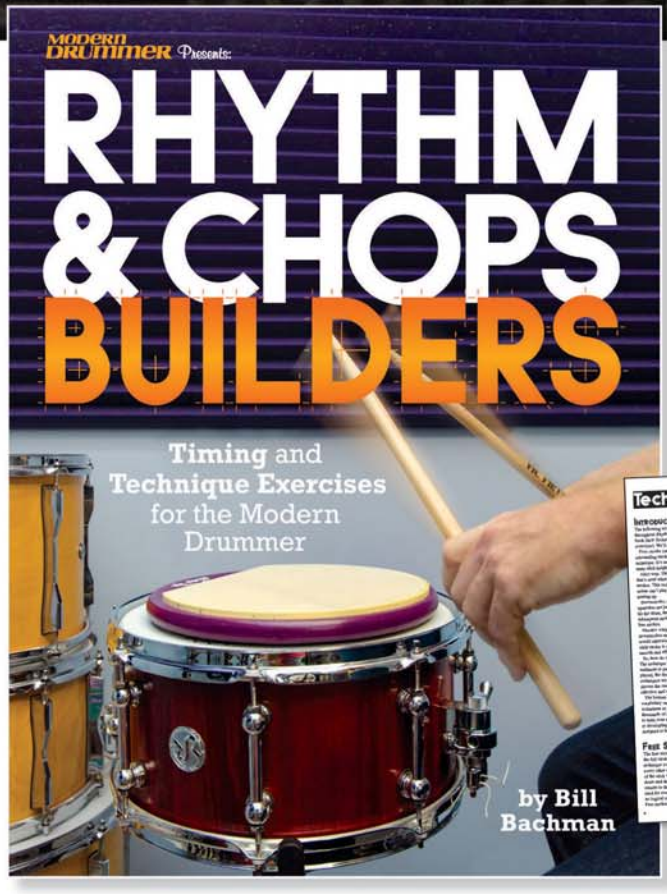

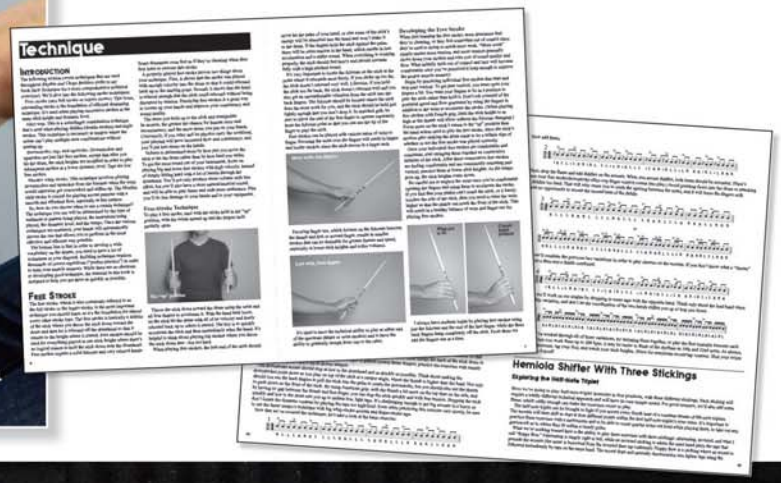

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Alex Solca

YoshimiO

YoshimiO—"Just my name with a circle at the end," the drummer explains—is a multi-instrumentalist and creative force at the center of a number of extraordinary musical powerhouses in Japanese experimental music. Drummer and *MD* contributor John Colpitts, who's had the good fortune to perform with her in the world-famous noise-rock aggregation known as Boredoms, gets to the heart of her art.

Translation by Hashim Kotaro Bharoocha

Coley Brown

Since joining Boredoms, the boundary-pushing Japanese band led by vocalist Yamantaka Eye (aka EYE), YoshimiO has been its trickster driving force for nearly the entirety of its thirty-year history. YoshimiO's humor and buoyancy offset EYE's ambitions to stretch the rock band format beyond its conventional borders. People who have spent time with YoshimiO can attest to her earthy sense of humor, infectious laughter, and joyous mien. While her astounding guitar and vocal work with the bands OOIOO and Saicobab stands on its own, drummers in particular should listen to her kit work with the Boredoms. A great place to start would be the band's 2004 album *Seadrum/House of Sun*, a typically sprawling Boredoms album that consists of two relentlessly percussive twenty-plus-minutes tracks. We interviewed the beloved member of the international alternative-music community through a translator, and very little of her charm and inspiring musical vision was lost in the process.

MD: Your first music lessons were based on the Western listening and singing practice known as solfège. Do you think this early study still informs your music and drumming?

YoshimiO: My mom had me take solfège lessons when I was three, because she felt that I would need it before taking piano lessons. I thought the solfège lessons were like games. There were games where the teacher would play a melody, and then I would listen to it and write down the musical notes as a chart. There was also a game where the teacher would play a chord, and I would figure out the notes the teacher played.

I don't know if those classes have anything to do with it, but when I hear sounds from everyday life, the wind, waves, natural sounds, insects, and animal sounds, they sound like melodies to me, and I feel like I'm totally surrounded by music. When I play the drums, rhythms will emerge from inside of me, and when that happens, I naturally start singing. Vocalizing and playing the drums have a symbiotic relationship for me, and when I do both it feels like I'm giving myself a massage.

MD: Your first contact with the drums came from working with EYE in the band UFO or Die. Do you remember that first time you played a drum?

YoshimiO: It was in 1986. The drums really resonated with me because as soon as you hit the drums, they instantly make a sound. I got deep into the drums right away because it was fun to figure out what kind of rhythms the music needed and find the kinds of beats that really resonated with me.

MD: Is it true that you don't practice music outside of band rehearsal time?

YoshimiO: I never had the desire to practice my instrument so much that I would become one with the instrument. But I do love and respect musicians that are one with their instruments. The way that I become one with my instrument is by being in a state where musical ideas will pop into my head that are given to us by God. In order to do that, you have to become a vessel for the music and not be hindered by anything, not be attached to anything. So in my everyday life I'm always conscious of being completely relaxed and completely myself.

MD: Despite your lack of dedicated solo practice, you're still a very accomplished composer, drummer, guitarist, pianist, improvisor, and singer. Is there something you can share with the readers about ways we can connect with our "natural musician" so to speak?

YoshimiO: I don't have any advice I can give. I don't think I have any accomplishments to speak of. I'm just being me.

EYE from the Boredoms always gets mad at me. He'll plead with me and say, "If

"In order to truly be yourself, you have to get rid of rules that things have to be a certain way, and not worry about what people think of you. If you have any of those notions, you can't really be free in expressing yourself."

Junko Futagawa

you don't practice, you won't be able to play my ideas. You don't have enough technique, so please practice." But I don't know how to practice instruments. When I play an instrument that I have a connection with, all I'm trying to do is express myself through it. It's not about ego but expressing yourself through an instrument; it's about releasing any attachments you have about yourself. You observe what is emanating from inside of you, and you transform that into sound. In order to truly be yourself, you have to get rid of rules that things have to be a certain way, and not worry about what people think of you. If you have any of those notions, you can't really be free in expressing yourself.

I think it's all about how much you know yourself, and how true you are to yourself in your life. The methods you choose to reach that state don't really matter.

MD: In a 2005 interview in *Index* magazine, you said that you do not think much about music unless you're in the practice space. How is it that you can create so much music with Saicobab, OOIOO, and Boredoms?

YoshimiO: That's true. Most of the members in OOIOO and Saicobab moved to the Kantō region [of Japan], so when we have rehearsals for shows or recording, I have to take a four-hour train ride from Osaka to meet with them. When I'm alone and riding on a fast vehicle like a train, that's when I get the most ideas for compositions and melodies. I intentionally place myself in situations where I'll be able to hear musical ideas in my head. For OOIOO, we're lucky if we can get in the studio twice to rehearse before a show. As for the Boredoms, we need to rehearse a lot in order to be able to complete one idea. The only time I play instruments is when I'm rehearsing with one of my bands.

MD: When you create songs with the Boredoms and OOIOO, do you create demos with all the parts and you teach the band? How do your songs come about?

YoshimiO: If I have a certain polyrhythm I want to use in a song, I'll explain that to the other members. They then interpret my ideas and play to the best of their abilities, so my initial idea naturally evolves into something else. When they start playing my ideas and I hear something interesting, I'll make that part of the song.

MD: You say that you develop ideas on those long train rides to meet the rest of the band. Can you expand on this?

YoshimiO: Initially I don't hear the ideas in my head. For example, with OOIOO, I'll imagine what the color of our clothing should be for our next show, and then I'll be able to visualize a setting that we've never played in, and I'll be able to see ourselves playing onstage. Maybe I'll imagine us wearing red costumes and playing in a beautiful green rice paddy. And then I'll imagine, *What kind of music would be cool if we played there?* Then I'll start hearing some strange music in my head. I will frantically try to listen to the music playing in my head and take notes. Then I'll take that to the band and say, "Let's play this music." We're just having fun. It's nothing that serious.

MD: Talk a little bit about *Flower of Sulphur*, your collaborative album with drummer/percussionist Susie Ibarra and multi-instrumentalist Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe.

YoshimiO: It's a live recording. We toured throughout the U.K., but every night our improvisations changed, similarly to how the weather or the stars change constantly. I really dug deep into myself for these performances, and it felt like something new was emerging from within myself, so it was a surprise even for me.

MD: Before 77 Boa Drum [a live Boredoms performance in Brooklyn, New York, on July 7, 2007, that featured seventy-seven drummers], Boredoms were certainly an uncompromising band. But you still were a band in the conventional sense. After 77 Boa Drum the project grew and evolved into something more radical and unprecedented—and you embraced more and more drums. Why were the drums so essential to this transition?

YoshimiO: It would be best to ask EYE about this. I don't feel like I'm in a position to talk about how the band has changed.

I've always played what I wanted to in the Boredoms in order to express myself freely. I joined in 1988, and for some reason I ended up playing drums in the band. I always wondered, *Am I a drummer in the Boredoms?* Looking back, it was a big shock when the guitar player and bass player that I loved left the band, and I couldn't play with them anymore. The connection with those people was really important to me. But I discovered that the foundation of the Boredoms wasn't destroyed. Later, EYE kept on coming up with new configurations and concepts without being bound to any rules. I always enjoyed playing in these different configurations, because I could express myself freely in them.

The band changed a lot visually, and I don't think there were any bands back then that were mostly centered around drummers. The band's foundation was always pure, and we were always doing what we thought was interesting and trying to experience sounds that we never had before.

I don't see myself as just a drummer or musician in this band. Boredoms is an environment in which I can truly express myself. I feel blessed to be in this band. When I'm vocalizing, hitting the drums, or making any kind of sounds, I'm still playing in a band. That means that I'm going to be playing in front of somebody, but whatever the history there is in the environment that I'm playing in, it's not about the ego. I feel the most joy when I play the sounds that naturally emanate from me, and when I feel that I'm one with those sounds. That's when I truly feel free. ●

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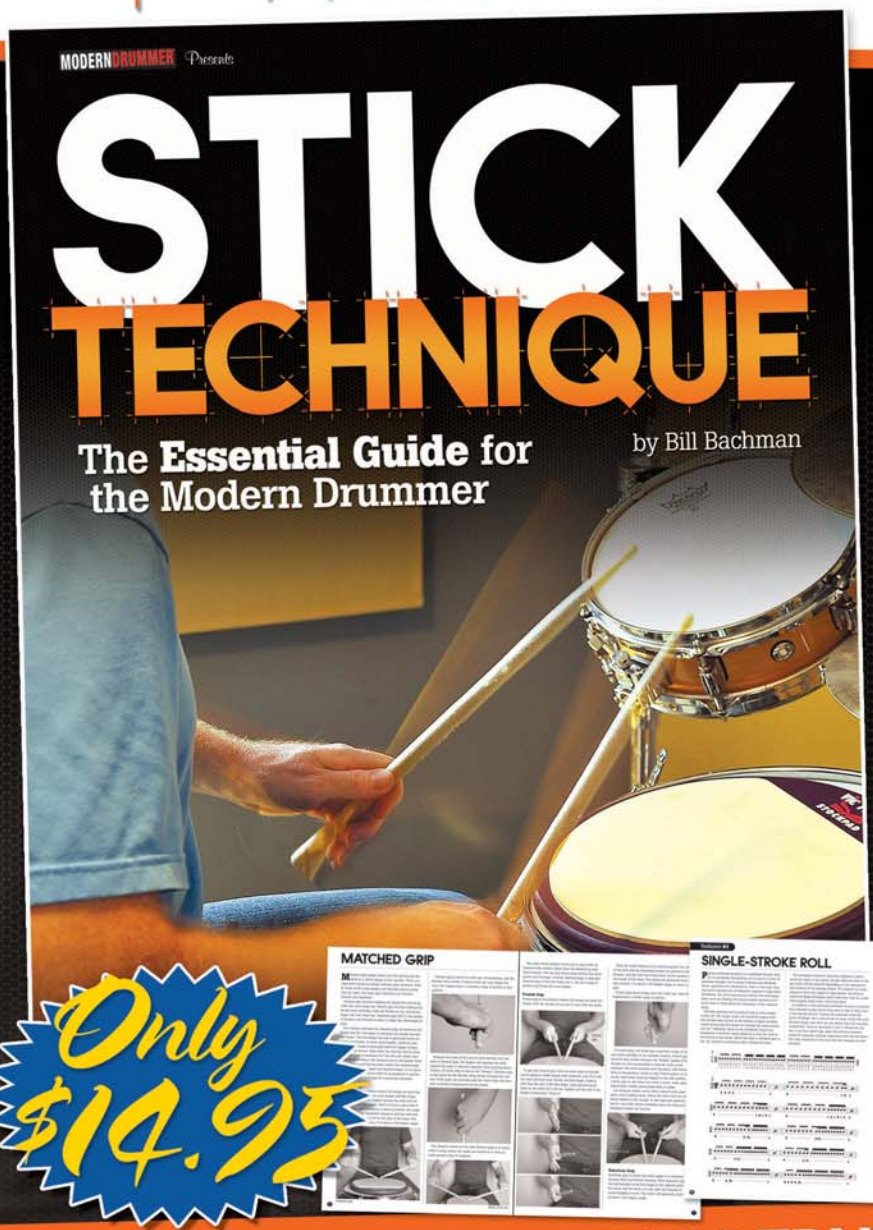

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Boredoms Beats

Exploring the Unique Grooves and Fills of YoshimiO and Yojiro Tatekawa

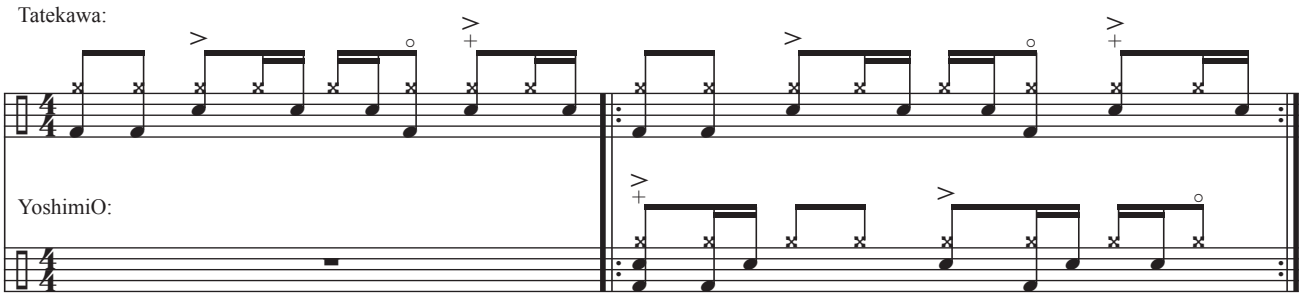
Text by John Colpitts
Transcriptions by Yojiro Tatekawa

Although Yojiro Tatekawa (or "Yo2Ro" as written in Boredoms' vernacular) could seem shy and unassuming in person, behind the kit he's an absolute master. In Boredoms, he's also a perfect foil for YoshimiO's more natural, untutored playing. Tatekawa teaches drumset full-time at a school in Osaka, Japan, and is a dedicated student to the history and pedagogy of the instrument. Since joining Boredoms, he's become an essential member, helping to craft and document the complex multi-drummer rhythms that help define the band's trademark sound. Here we dive deep into three killer Boredoms tunes with the drummer.

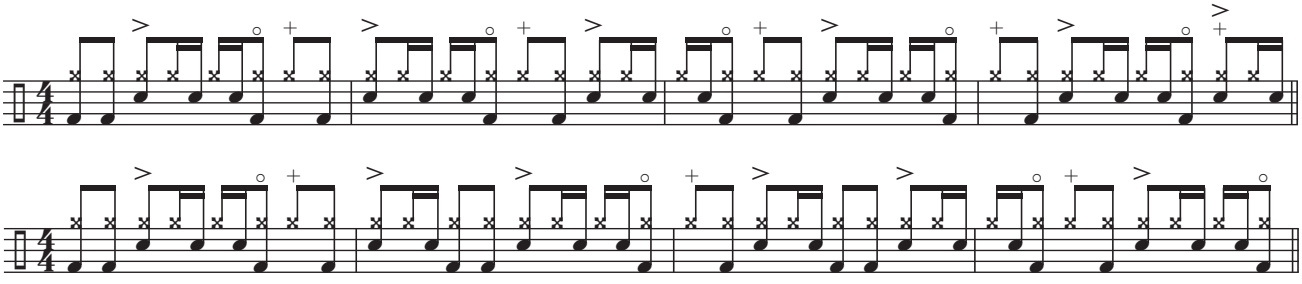
"Super Going"

Exercise 1 demonstrates the offset dual drumming patterns from the song "Super Going," from Boredoms' 1998 album, *Super æ*. The groove was created by accident in the studio when an overdub against a basic funk rhythm was displaced by two beats. The resulting combined rhythm features strong accents on every quarter note.

When Boredoms play this live, Tatekawa starts the sequence by accenting beats 2 and 4, and YoshimiO joins in after a measure, accenting beats 1 and 3. The groove combines a strong quarter-note pulse with the offbeat accents of both drummers, creating a complicated sound that only one drummer wouldn't be able to replicate.



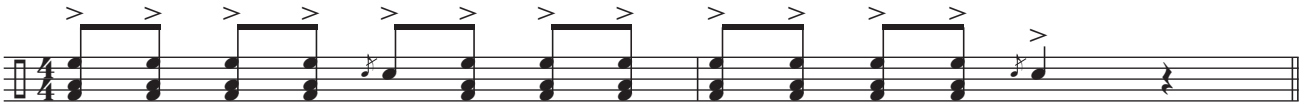
Tatekawa will often add some more complex figures to play against the basic "Super Going" beat, such as the variations found in the following examples.



YoshimiO and Tatekawa also play some fills inspired by Tihai, which is a polyrhythmic phrase found in Indian music that's added to an existing pulse to alter the perception of the overarching beat. YoshimiO will play a Tihai fill, and Yojiro is able to catch the reference and respond immediately. They're simple ideas but are highly expandable.

"Acid Police"

This unique groove is simple but a lot of fun to play. "Acid Police" opens Boredoms' 1994 album, *Chocolate Synthesizer*, and typically ends their epic concerts. It's relentless and is often played for twenty or even thirty minutes. It looks simple, but it is a brutal physical workout.



"Rakuty"

Although the group hasn't recorded this song, it's been incorporated into their live set for the last ten years. The beat is influenced by a Turkish pulse that Yojiro's teacher taught him, and the drummer thought it would work well on the kit.

Yojiro Tatekawa

Superimposing 4/4 Ideas Over 3/4

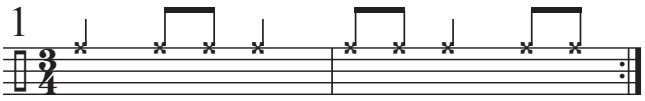
A Simple Approach to Implied Time

by Ted Warren

Because we play the drumset with four limbs, we can present more than one feel or time signature at once. In this article I'll demonstrate how we can use 4/4 ideas in a 3/4 setting to create different feels and phrases.

Drummers tend to be more comfortable superimposing three-beat ideas over 4/4, rather than placing a four-beat idea over measures of 3/4. Exercise 1 presents a common example of placing a four-beat idea over 3/4. We'll refer to this as Ride Pattern 1.

1

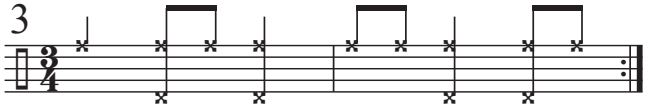


This is a great device to start with, as it gives us a two-bar phrase in 3/4. Next let's add one of the most common 3/4 hi-hat-foot patterns to our 4/4 ride-pattern feel. We'll call this 3/4 Hi-Hat Pattern 1. Even though we're only working with two limbs at this point, the coordination can be a little tricky.

2

Exercise 3 demonstrates Ride Pattern 1 and Hi-Hat Pattern 1 played together.

3



To further enforce the feeling of 3/4, let's add some snare and bass drum comping.

4

5

6

7

Now play the previous examples using Hi-Hat Patterns 2, 3, and 4.

8

Speaking of the hi-hat, let's now try playing the previous ride and snare/bass drum patterns with the following hi-hat part, which also implies 4/4.

9

Now let's try the implied 4/4 hi-hat pattern with some more standard 3/4 ride patterns.

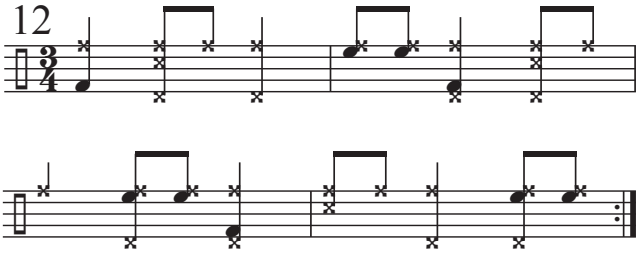
10

Finally, let's use the following snare and bass drum ideas to further imply a 4/4 time signature.

11

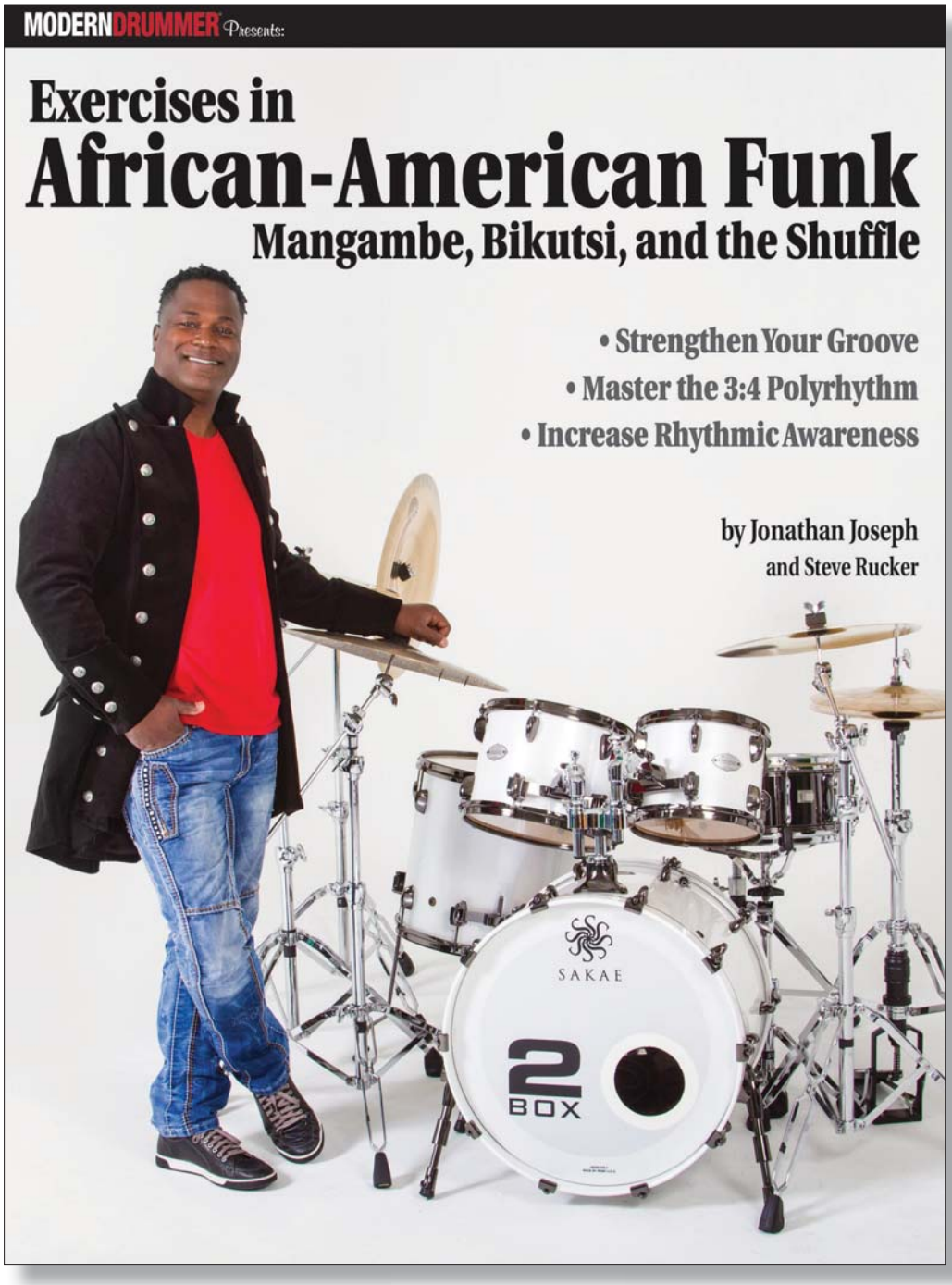
In this case, notice that it takes four measures of 3/4 for the pattern to start again. Exercise 12 demonstrates this with our first ride and hi-hat patterns in 3/4.

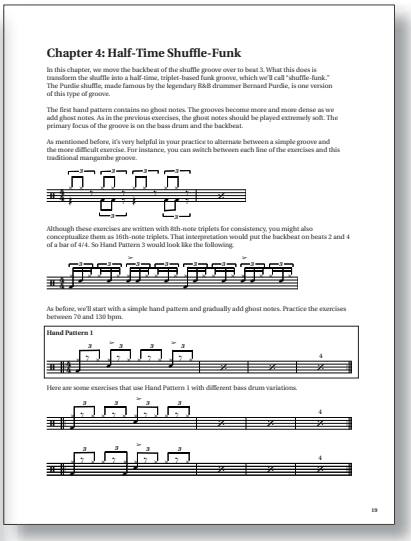
12



Obviously there's a fair amount of coordination involved, so take your time and strive to keep your head in the home time signature of 3/4. Counting out loud can help you until you start to hear how the 4/4 phrases cross the barline. As always, have fun!

Ted Warren teaches at the University of Guelph. He's worked with Mel Tormé, Rob McConnell, Slide Hampton, Bob Newhart, Maynard Ferguson, Lew Soloff, Chuck Mangione, Jeff Healey, Norma Winstone, Sheila Jordan, Howard Johnson, Nick Brignola, Kenny Wheeler, and Gerry Bergonzi.





Chapter 4: Half-Time Shuffle-Funk

In this chapter, we move the backbeat of the shuffle groove over to beat 3. What this does is transform the shuffle into a half-time, triplet-based funk groove, which we'll call "shuffle-funk." The Purdie shuffle, made famous by the legendary R&B drummer Bernard Purdie, is one version of this type of groove.

The first hand pattern contains no ghost notes. The grooves become more and more dense as we add ghost notes. As in the previous exercises, the ghost notes should be played extremely soft. The primary focus of the groove is on the bass drum and the backbeat.

As mentioned before, it's very helpful in your practice to alternate between a simple groove and the more difficult exercise. For instance, you can switch between each line of the exercises and this traditional mangambe groove.

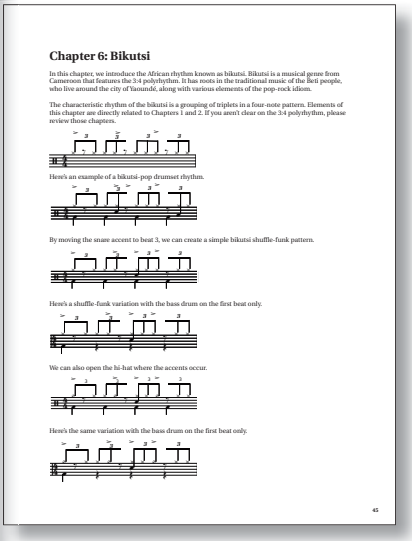
Although these exercises are written with 8th-note triplets for consistency, you might also conceptualize them as 16th-note triplets. That interpretation would put the backbeat on beats 2 and 4 of a bar of 4/4. So Hand Pattern 3 would look like the following.

As before, we'll start with a simple hand pattern and gradually add ghost notes. Practice the exercises between 70 and 130 bpm.

Hand Pattern 1

Here are some exercises that use Hand Pattern 1 with different bass drum variations.

19



Chapter 6: Bikutsi

In this chapter, we introduce the African rhythm known as bikutsi. Bikutsi is a musical genre from Cameroon that features the 3:4 polyrhythm. It has roots in the traditional music of the Beti people, who live around the city of Yaoundé, along with various elements of the pop-rock idiom.

The characteristic rhythm of the bikutsi is a grouping of triplets in a four-note pattern. Elements of this chapter are directly related to Chapters 1 and 2. If you aren't clear on the 3:4 polyrhythm, please review those chapters.

Here's an example of a bikutsi-pop drumset rhythm.

By moving the snare accent to beat 3, we can create a simple bikutsi shuffle-funk pattern.

Here's a shuffle-funk variation with the bass drum on the first beat only.

We can also open the hi-hat where the accents occur.

Here's the same variation with the bass drum on the first beat only.

45

Written by renowned drummer Jonathan Joseph (Jeff Beck, Joss Stone, Richard Bona) and University of Miami director of drumset studies Steve Rucker, *Exercises in African-American Funk* is designed to introduce musicians who've studied jazz, R&B, rock, soul, and blues to a concept that applies West African rhythms to various genres.

The series of exercises contained in the book guide you through a fusion of African and American elements. On the American side, we have shuffle and shuffle-funk. On the African side, we have the rhythms from Cameroon known as mangambe and bikutsi. Mastering these exercises will strengthen your groove, provide you with an understanding of the three-against-four polyrhythm, give you an awareness of the second partial of the triplet, and introduce you to a fresh new way to hear and feel music.

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Funkify Your Swing

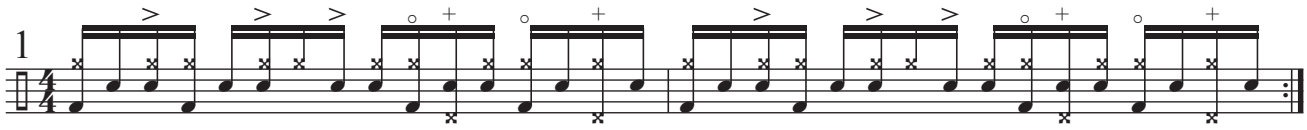
Part 2: "Soul Vaccination"

by Steve Fidyk

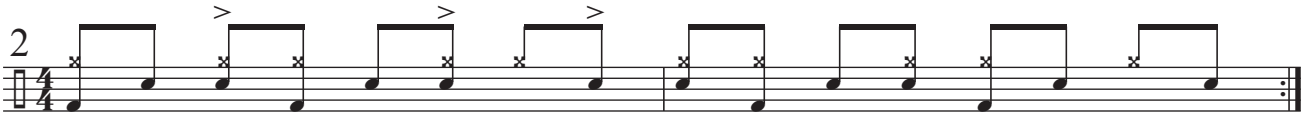
Welcome to the second installment in this series on fusing funk rhythms within a swing concept. As mentioned previously, combining funk rhythms into a swing style can be helpful for players looking for new accompaniment language. These converted rhythms provide a flow to the swing groove that differs from the standard "layered ostinato" style that most drummers practice when developing coordinated independence. Thinking about rhythm and style in this manner can help any musician become more flexible and adaptable on the bandstand.

In Part 1 [May 2019] we explored ways of interpreting the groove Clyde Stubblefield played on the classic James Brown tune "Funky Drummer." This month's lesson features variations inspired by an equally heavy innovator who continues to amaze, Tower of Power's David Garibaldi.

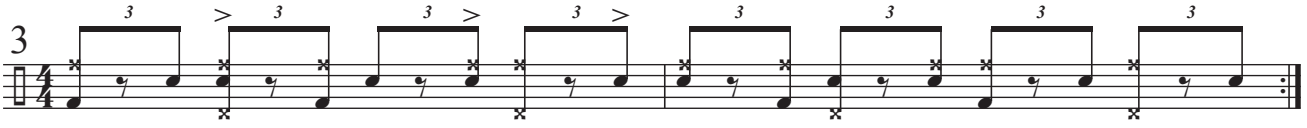
Let's start by checking out variations of Garibaldi's classic groove from "Soul Vaccination," from Tower of Power's self-titled 1973 release. As you practice, focus your attention on maintaining dynamic balance and consistency with your hands and feet. Work on the groove slowly at first with a metronome, take your time, and be patient with your progress. Here's the main pattern.



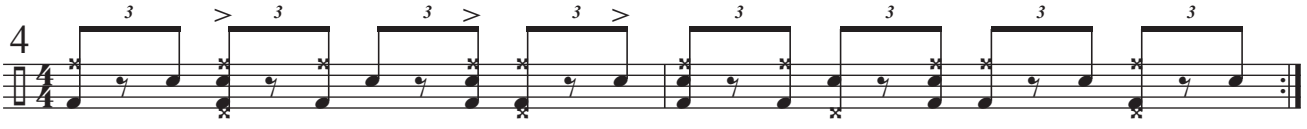
Next, double the length of each note's duration from the original pattern using the augmentation technique described in Part 1 of this series. With this technique applied, each one-measure groove becomes a two-measure 8th-note phrase.



Exercise 3 illustrates the augmented two-measure phrase interpreted within a swung 8th-note feel on the ride. The hi-hat accompanies on beats 2 and 4.



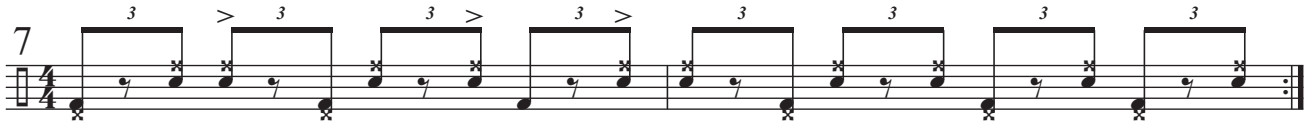
In Exercise 4, the bass drum is played in unison with each ride cymbal rhythm.



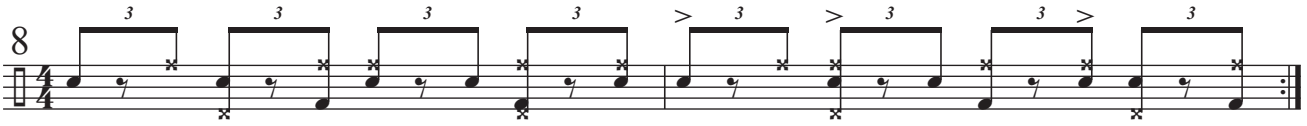
Exercise 5 varies the bass drum rhythm from Exercise 4, alternating between the kick and hi-hat.

The next variation fills in 8th-note triplets between each ride cymbal note. The accompanying hi-hat and bass drum rhythm is the same as the previous example, except with a reversed voicing.

Exercise 7 places the ride cymbal in unison with each written snare rhythm. The bass drum and hi-hat are also in unison, played in between the hands to create a linear hemiola that's shuffled.



The next variation demonstrates a reversed hand voicing of Exercise 3, with hi-hat accompaniment on beats 2 and 4.



Next try reordering Exercise 8 by playing the second bar followed by the first.

Exercise 10 displaces Exercise 8 by starting the phrase on beat 3 of the second measure of the original example.

These demonstrate only a few variations on this classic David Garibaldi groove. Use your imagination, be creative, and try coming up with your own version of this beat. With practice, you can add some serious funk to your swing feel. See you next time!

Steve Fidyk leads the Parlour Project quartet, featuring his original compositions and arrangements. He is a member of the Jazz Orchestra of Philadelphia under the direction of Terell Stafford, and a former member of the Army Blues Big Band of Washington, DC. He is also an artist in residence at Temple University and the University of the Arts.

Quintuplet Linear Patterns

Adding Some Funk to Odd Groupings

by Aaron Edgar

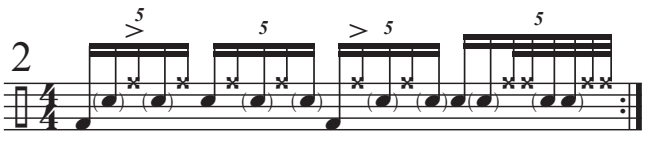
Applying a linear concept is one of my favorite ways to phrase ideas on the drums. Although they're inherently funky, linear patterns can also serve multiple purposes. Phrases that work well as grooves almost always translate equally well into fills and other statements.

One of the easiest ways to incorporate linear ideas is to play a groove, pick one limb, and move that limb to different voices around the kit. Immediately the groove will take on a different flavor. Start embellishing multiple limbs, add doubles, and adjust your dynamics. Now the original pattern can really go a long way.

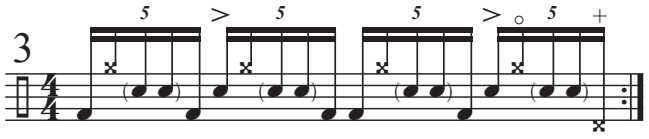
Exercise 1 utilizes single strokes between your right hand on a stack and your left hand on the snare. The first half of the bar starts with the left hand after an initial kick on beat 1. The second half starts with your right hand after the bass drum on beat 3. If you're having trouble making this feel comfortable, spend some time practicing each half of the example individually before putting it all together.

To get an idea of how you can utilize orchestration, try playing this same pattern with your right hand on the floor tom instead of a stack and your left on a rack tom instead of the snare. Playing 2 and 4 on the snare will maintain the previous groove's feel.

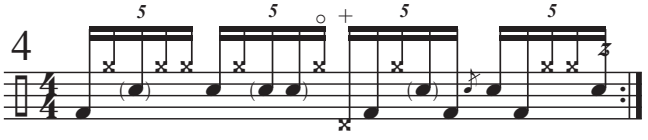
Exercise 2 embellishes Exercise 1 with accents and a flurry of double strokes over the last three quintuplet partials. This pattern also sounds great on the toms.



Utilizing linear concepts is also a great way to develop rhythmic themes. Exercise 3 applies a three-note grouping starting on the second quintuplet partial of each beat: hi-hat, ghost stroke, and another ghost stroke. The first and fifth quintuplet partials are played by the kick and snare to create a groove. Pay special attention to the open and closed hi-hat notes on beat 4.

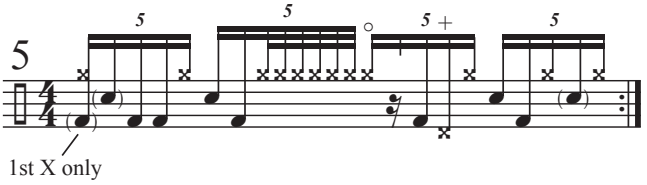


Exercise 4 explores a paradiddle theme in the first half of the measure while the latter half contrasts with that feel.

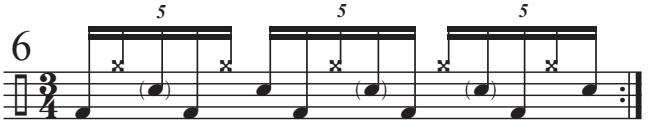


Exercise 5 is worth paying extra attention to. The bass drum on the first beat should be there to start off the groove, but as you loop the pattern, omit it either entirely, or play it on every other pass. There are also some 32nd notes leading up to an open hi-hat, and you can play these with singles or with doubles. Each sticking will work well, but they add a slightly different flavor between the two options.

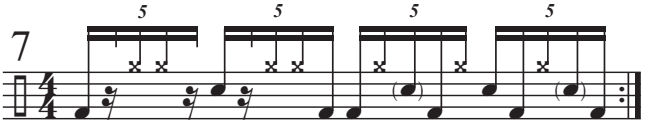
One cool thing with double strokes is that they work well when played between two different sound sources. Splitting them between a stack or ride on your right and the hi-hats on your left is a cool way to vary the previous pattern. Just make sure the open hi-hat note remains open until the fourth quintuplet partial ("ah") of beat 3.



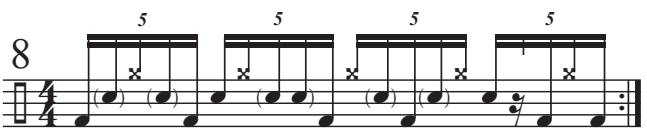
One staple of linear phrasing is a three-note sticking: kick, right and left. The next example takes it without variation through a bar of 3/4, where it fits evenly and gives us a five-over-three polyrhythmic groove. Be sure to still feel a solid quarter-note pulse. The five equally spaced kick, hi-hat, and snare strokes should feel like a syncopation over the quarter note.



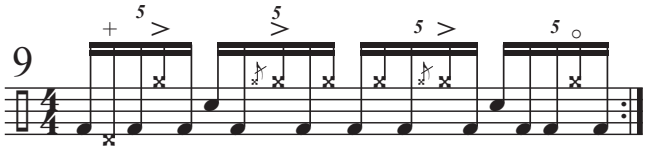
Exercise 7 explores one of the more common quintuplet rhythms. Play the first ("ta"), third ("din"), and fourth ("ah") partials of the quintuplet during the first half of the measure, and then utilize the lick-right-left phrase in the second half to create a 4/4 groove.



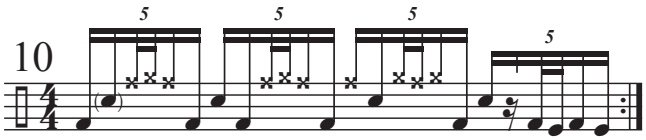
Continuing with polyrhythms, this next example explores five-over-four with the stack placement. Just as in Exercise 6, make sure you're feeling the quarter-note pulse. Your stack needs to feel like a syncopation against the pulse. Make sure the ghost notes are extra soft in this beat—treat the bass drum, snare, and stack almost as if they're the only voices in the groove. The ghost notes should just barely be audible as a texture underneath the main pattern. Dynamics play a massive role in making linear beats sound great.



Exercise 9 employs a five-over-two kick phrasing with an embellishment on beat 4. The spaces leave room for a backbeat on 2 and 4, and we'll fill in the rest with the hi-hat. If you play the snare and accented hi-hat notes with your left hand, your right hand can play the grace notes of the two flams and both of the hi-hat notes quietly between them.

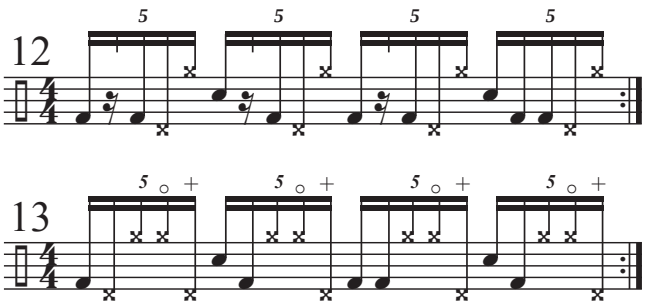


The next example utilizes three-stroke ruffs as a theme on the third ("din") and fourth ("ah") quintuplet partials. This is another great example of a pattern that works amazingly well on the toms. If you want to get fancy, try matching the final bass drum flurry by playing along on stacks, splashes, or bells.

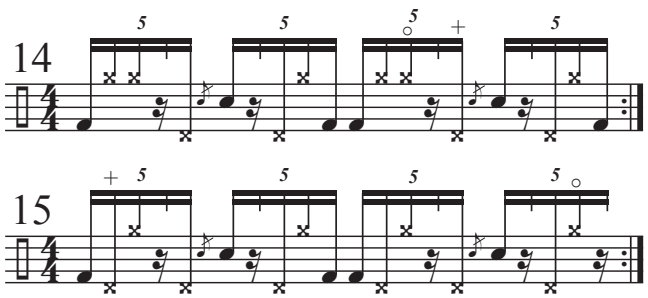


The last idea we'll explore in depth utilizes the hi-hat foot as its own texture within grooves. Exercise 11 places the second ("ka") and fourth ("ah") quintuplet partials on a stack with a single hi-hat-foot note between the two stack strokes on beat 4.

Exercises 12 and 13 explore ideas that are opposite from one another. In Exercise 12, the final two partials of each quintuplet ("ah," "gah") are played on the hi-hat pedal and the hi-hat. These will sound best on the same instrument. In Exercise 13 we play the opposite with the pedaled hi-hat on the final quintuplet partial preceded by an open hi-hat with your sticks.



Exercise 14 takes another stab at the left-foot phrasing, this time varying its placement within the quintuplet rather than favoring a single partial. In Exercise 15 we embellish the same groove even further while utilizing the same idea.



Now that you've worked your way through the examples in this lesson, take some time to embellish your favorites. A great place to start would be to take that kick-right-left idea and phrase it across multiple subdivisions. If you take a bar of 4/4 in which you play quintuplets on beats 1 and 2 and 16ths on beats 3 and 4, the pattern will fit evenly throughout the measure, and you'll already have a snare backbeat on beats 2 and 4.

For me, the most fun part of these types of concepts is exploring the patterns with reckless abandon. Finding your own variations and phrasings sparks creativity like nothing else!

Aaron Edgar plays with the Canadian prog-metal band Third Ion and is a session drummer, clinician, and author. His latest book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*, is available through Modern Drummer Publications.

NEW and NOTABLE

Mattoon
Rosewood/ Maple Drumsets

Available in multiple sizes and configurations, Mattoon drums feature a maple core with inner and outer plies of santos (Bolivian) rosewood. The shells are finished by hand and appointed with solid-brass lugs that are machined in house. Also offered is a black-lacquered brass snare with custom hand engraving.
chrismattoon.com

IK Multimedia
UNO Drum

The UNO Drum drum machine is said to offer a sonic palette combining fat, punchy analog sounds with digital flexibility. Each kit includes two kicks, a snare, claps, open and closed hi-hats, two toms, rim click, a cowbell, a ride, and a crash. Each of the twelve touch-sensitive pads has two velocity zones, and the unit includes a sixty-four-step sequencer. UNO Drum comes preloaded with one hundred drum patterns and offers USB and MIDI connectivity via 2.5 mm jacks. List price is $249.99.
unodrum.com

Pearl
ICON Rack System

All of the components of Pearl's preconfigured single- and three-sided ICON rack packages have been upgraded to include a rotating support foot. Also, new accessory clamps have been developed for the slip-free square rails and round support pipes.

pearldrum.com

Latin Percussion
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Emblazoned with a signature E logo, this line pays tribute to the Escovedo family. Timbales are manufactured with 6.5"-deep chrome-plated steel shells in 14" and 15" diameters. The set comes with a heavy-duty, height-adjustable stand, a hex-shaped cowbell bracket, sticks, and a tuning wrench. List price is $1,030.99.

E-Class bongos are crafted from Siam oak and topped with 7.25" and 8.625" rawhide heads. Additional features include Comfort Curve II rims, .3125"-diameter tuning lugs, steel backing plates, and cast-aluminum bottoms. List price is $492.99.

The E-Class congas include quinto, conga, and tumba sizes and have 3-ply, 30"-tall Siam oak shells with a striped natural/walnut stain finish. Included are .3125" tension rods and ProCare shell protectors. List prices are $846.99 for the quinto, $861.99 for the conga, and $892.99 for the tumba.

lpmusic.com

NEW and NOTABLE

Tama
Powerpad Cymbal Bag

This bag is designed to carry cymbals up to 22" in its main compartment and hi-hat or effect cymbals up to 15" in the front pocket. Other features include a protective 20 mm semi-hard cushion with a nylon surface and a padded shoulder strap and handle. The bag is offered in four colors with suede accents.
tama.com

Gon Bops
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Said to be sturdy and portable, the new stand attaches to any standard bass drum pedal and offers a .375"-diameter adjustable post that slides to an exact position to strike cowbells, blocks, tambourines, or other mountable small percussion instruments.
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Nelson Drum Shop
Nashville, Tennessee

Just as the storied city that is home to Bryson Nelson's vintage and boutique drum emporium has experienced significant growth in recent years, the twenty-seven-year-old California native's shop has been expanding right along with it. Since he arrived in Nashville in 2015, Nelson has gone from playing on the contemporary Christian scene and selling the unique drums he'd amassed while by appointment only from his garage, to setting up shop in a 2,700-square-foot space he purchased in the thriving Inglewood neighborhood.

Prior to moving into that larger space, Nelson was shoehorning his growing inventory into a 500-square-foot space in East Nashville, where he had trouble making space for his computer among the Trixon, Radio King, and Sugar kits. Now he has ample space to display his wares, which include a fleet of boutique and vintage rental kits that have been used by players like Matt Chamberlain, Jay Bellerose, Steve Jordan, and Fred Eltringham in recent months.

"It's very exciting and very scary at the same time," says Nelson, a self-professed vintage drum nerd, of the expansion. "I've never bought a commercial property, so it's intimidating." In the midst of setting up the new shop, Nelson talked to *Modern Drummer* about his evolution from drummer/collector to drum retailer.

"My wife and I moved to Nashville from California so we could afford a home—that was the number-one reason. And then the shop kind of happened organically. I wasn't planning on opening a retail shop. Sales-y things just kind of grossed me out. Whenever someone starts talking about "sales," it just sounds so yucky. I was afraid of opening up a retail shop because a few of the shops I used to go in growing up, they always felt cold, and they only really cared about your business. I just hated that.

I'd gathered a big collection of vintage drums. I'd been doing that for six or seven years. I was always very excited by studio drummers, and how you could use different tones and drums for different things. So I'd always have fifteen snares at a time or five or six kits at a time, and they were just constantly flipping. I never held onto things for very long. I was really addicted to the hunt of vintage drums. Since I wasn't too sentimental about any drum in particular, it was an easy transition into retail. The most exciting part is hunting down the drums, playing everything that comes in, then watching somebody else play it and get excited about it.

There are only two drum shops in Nashville, my shop and Fork's Drum Closet. What we do is very different. They don't really mess with vintage at all or the boutique thing. And our thing is just vintage and boutique. Locally, my shop is known as a hang shop. Guys want to come in and hang out and talk drums, have a coffee, maybe walk across the street and get tacos. I've tried hard to cultivate that vibe. And we get a lot of different types of players coming in. We get a lot of guys that are on different country gigs that couldn't care less about vintage drums, but they come over just because they want to hang out. And we get a lot of out-of-towners that like what we do online and want to come and check out the shop.

Nelson's staff of four includes restoration expert Lucas Aldridge, who is the son of well-known drum tech/historian John Aldridge. "I used to do all the restoration myself, but the shop got busier so I hired Lucas," Bryson Nelson explains. "He's ten times better at restoring than I am. He grew up restoring drums, and he's extremely attentive to detail." From left: Lemuel Hayes (shop employee/shop tech), Nelson, Aldridge, and Asa Lane (shop manager).

This circa 1940s Sparkling Gold finish Slingerland Radio King kit is typical of the type of gear that can move pretty quickly through Nelson Drum Shop. Note the early '40s Rolling Bomber snare with wood lugs and hoops, a response to the rules regulating the use of certain manufacturing materials during World War II. The set is outfitted with vintage A and K Zildjian cymbals. The kit in the inset photo is a rare Radio King set that was only made with wood hoops at the end of the Great War and for a short period of time after.

Shopper's Tip

"People should really have an idea of what they're looking for," suggests Bryson Nelson. "Know some tones you like from a certain song, know what genre you're looking to use drums for, what environment you'll be using the drums in. Are you playing live in a small room or on a big stage? Is it going to be in a studio? Those are the questions we ask."

I try to stay really aware of what everybody else is selling (vintage) things for. I don't necessarily want to out-price everybody, but I want to stay competitive. I started a shop to sell to my friends, so it's not about having prices people can't afford. I want people to take the drums, even if we end up making less money. I'm always happy to work with people, especially when they're on a budget. I want to sell to people that are really excited about these drums, versus just getting top dollar for a drum I sold online and shipping it off to Idaho or some place where there's no relationship with the buyer. That helps with the business, but the part that really excites me is selling to the guys that are excited about what they're getting.

My shop feels like an antique shop in a way. People come in and if something's $600, they'll say, "I've got $400, but I really want this drum." People don't do that all the time, but it's totally cool with me; I never take offense to that.

In a town like Nashville, there are so many drummers here. Every day I check my email and somebody local will write and say, "Hey, this is what I have," or, "I have this old Rogers kit…." We buy drums on the spot, so people bring in their old drums all the time. And I'd say every week someone brings in something from some iconic drummer or some great recording. We (recently) bought drums that one of Paul Simon's drummers had used, we have some drums from Aaron Sterling and Alabama Shakes, a snare from Steve Jordan…. There are so many legendary players here and so many cool bands, so there's a great selection of stuff coming in."

Interview by Patrick Berkery

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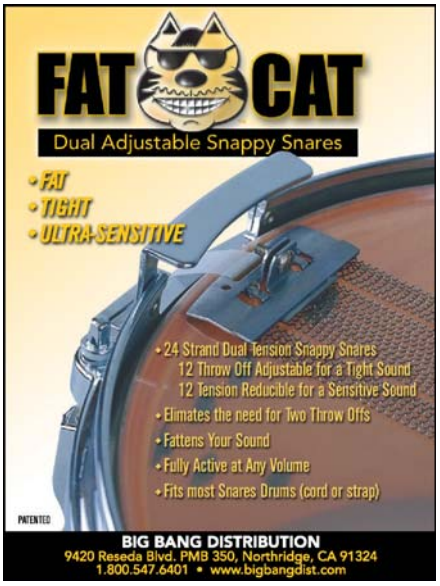

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CRITIQUE

RECORDINGS Taking the Reins

Herlin Riley
Perpetual Optimism

A master serves up a marriage of straight-ahead swing and the funky grooves of his native New Orleans.

The title pretty much sums up the energy of Herlin Riley's drumming. And you can add to that "perpetual youth." The veteran jazz drummer returns with the four superb young sidemen who excelled on his previous disc, *New Direction*: pianist Emmet Cohen, bassist Russell Hall, alto saxophonist Godwin Louis, and trumpeter Bruce Harris. Riley composed half of the disc's ten tracks, showcasing a penchant for melody, surprise left turns, fun odd-meter dalliances, and plenty of feel-good grooves. The charged opener, "Rush Hour," says it all with its funky/swing hybrid feel peppered with church-inspired handclaps and tambourine. On "Borders Without Lines" the drummer's exhilarating up-tempo swing chops rule supreme. And his killin' mid-tune extended solo, played over a popping ostinato, will hasten you to hit "replay." (Mack Avenue) **Jeff Potter**

Gregory Miles

Branford Marsalis
The Secret Between the Shadow and the Soul

At twenty-eight years old, JUSTIN FAULKNER has commanded the drum chair in Branford Marsalis's quartet for nearly a decade—and continues to astound on the group's new release.

After masterfully toying with the cartoonish cadence of album opener "Dance of the Evil Toys," Justin Faulkner goes into warp drive on "Conversation Among the Ruins," taking the band on a swinging, breathtaking ride as he colors beautifully and shows an inventive and unbound brush style. Later, on the cha-cha-cha "Cianna," he punctuates off-beats with splashes of cymbals, press rolls, and toms. Next up, bassist Eric Revis's composition "Nilaste" becomes a rhythmic free-for-all-for-one, with Faulkner constantly subdividing, energizing, creating while reacting, inspiring. He pauses to begin fresh with Joey Calderazzo's piano solo, cymbals simmering, before turning on all the jets, interpreting and composing at an amazing pace. He guides the current without playing the time, filling the right spaces and creating traction. Jousting with saxman/leader Marsalis throughout *The Secret*…, Faulkner is collaborative and daring in all the best ways. (OKeh) **Robin Tolleson**

Michel Petrucciani Trio
One Night in Karlsruhe

Roy Haynes blazes in a well-matched virtuosic trio.

Any previously unreleased material featuring the Greatest Living Elder Statesman of Jazz Drumming is a gift. And this one's a pearl. Featuring the late pianist Michel Petrucciani, bassist Gary Peacock, and Haynes, this July 1988 concert from Germany is a rocket-fueled affair: up-tempos dominate. Petrucciani is aggressive, precise, and hard swinging, as is Haynes. A highlight is "There Will Never Be Another You," on which Haynes galvanizes with his clean popping ride while accenting and interjecting ideas in all the right places. After trading eights with Petrucciani, he intensely launches the trio into a fireworks finale. In contrast, Petrucciani lingers elegantly on the melody of "In a Sentimental Mood," and Haynes' graceful brushes answer in kind. This super trio had only previously been heard on half of the tracks from *Michel Plays Petrucciani* (1988), making this late arrival a welcome addition to Haynes' glorious discography. (SWR Jazzhaus) **Jeff Potter**

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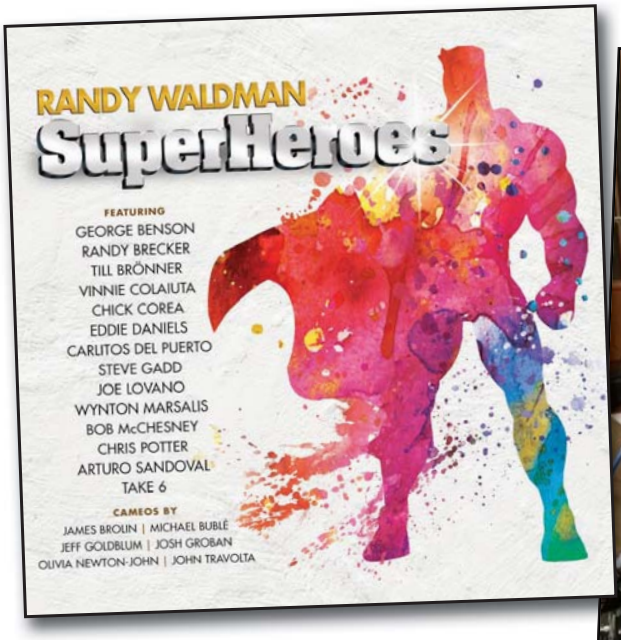
Randy Waldman *Superheroes*

More masterful session work from VINNIE COLAIUTA plus some inspired meetings of the sticks with STEVE GADD.

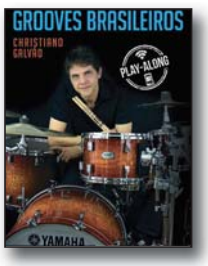


Pianist Randy Waldman has previously released jazzified albums of classical music and TV themes where he let Vinnie Colaiuta loose beyond measure, and here he brings back Mr. C to put his stamp on a collection of superhero-related material. Colaiuta has an exceptional knack for sounding spontaneous and in the moment, even when he's likely reading a chart that takes up two music stands. On "Superman (Movie)," Colaiuta tackles the thoroughly arranged head with unobtrusive sidesticking and well-placed stops, before swinging at different tempos underneath lovely George Benson solos. And the wild but totally in control drum break onslaught ending "Batman Theme (TV)" could only come from Vinnie's unique brain and limbs. An extra treat comes in the form of three tracks that include Steve Gadd double drumming with Colaiuta. "Both drumkits were set up facing each other," writes Waldman in the liner notes, "and it was a love-fest from the very first note they played together." Cue up "Six Million Dollar Man Theme" for a taste of the duo hopping from Latin flavors to master-class solos over vamps and more. (BFM Jazz) **Ilya Stemkovsky**

MULTIMEDIA

Brazilian Grooves Play-Along by Christiano Galvão

Newcomers to Brazilian drumset grooves could do worse than begin their journey here.



Christiano Galvão's latest educational resource, *Brazilian Grooves Play-Along*, focuses on two popular Brazilian rhythms: samba and baião. Typically it's up to the bateria (percussion ensemble) to perform these rhythms, but Galvão's book illustrates the ways a single drummer can distill them into a drumset. If Brazilian music were a spoken language, these drumset orchestrations would be foundational idioms—the equivalents of "How're you doing" and "What's going on." According to the author, they're a stepping-off point that should inspire new ideas.

Brazilian Grooves' main asset is the arsenal of tools' stored in the cloud and accessible by QR-codes that accompany the printed material. Galvão follows each new idiom with an original composition to which you can apply drumset orchestrations, an important, contextualizing step that method books often miss. There are videos of the idioms at fast and slow tempos, videos of the author performing the full tunes, *and* the audio tracks of all the songs at fast and slow tempos, with and without click tracks. A book has rarely made it so helpful to work up to performance tempo.

And Galvão plays the *hell* out of his charts in the supplemental videos, adding texture, color, and musicality to the foundational grooves. Unfortunately he doesn't shed enough light on how he arrived there, or provide a path for discovering embellishments and variations of your own. One solution could have been to include things to avoid when breaking from the literal clave orchestrations. I've spent about a month shedding the book, and I'm now much more comfortable with basic Brazilian musical idioms. But I'm hardly "speaking" like a local yet. The next time a Brazilian musician asks me the musical equivalent of "How ya doin," I might know what they're asking, but I won't necessarily have more of an idea how to respond in a way that would make them want to strike up a conversation. Perhaps Galvão will address that issue in a follow-up book; for now, this package can help you make important strides in the right direction. ($25, amazon.com) **Keith Carne**

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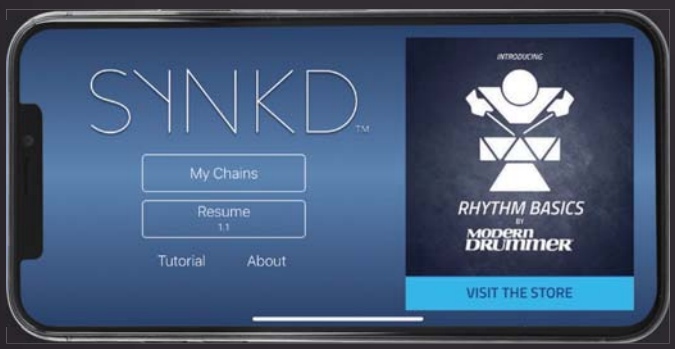

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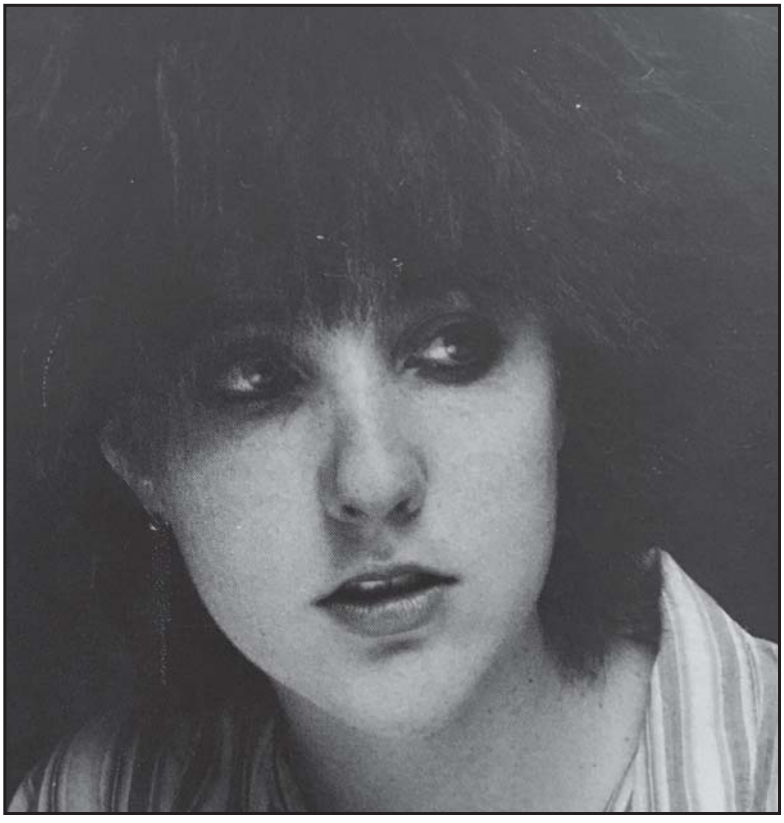
Remembering Sara Romweber

The Let's Active drummer left an indelible mark on southern alternative rock—and was taken much too soon. **Jon Wurster** of Superchunk shares her story and describes her lasting impression on him and many others.

The drumming community lost a beloved figure this past March 7 when Sara Romweber passed on at age fifty-five following a battle with cancer. Though not necessarily a household name, Romweber played a key role in forging the sound of early '80s southern rock and pop as the drummer in North Carolina's Let's Active.

Let's Active guitarist, songwriter, and producer Mitch Easter recruited Romweber to drum for his band in 1981 while she was still a teenager living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Romweber would go on to tour extensively with Let's Active and supply the inventive, left-of-center rhythms at the heart of the trio's first two releases: 1983's *Afoot* EP and their 1984 LP, *Cypress*.

Easter remembers Romweber as an exceptional drummer who helped bring his early music to life. "She was always great," he says. "A lot of our songs needed to fall between 'flailing away with abandon' and 'disco at 160 bpm,' all of which Sara instinctively understood and executed with aplomb." One needs to look no further than *Afoot*'s "In Between" and *Cypress*'s "Ornamental" for proof of Romweber's masterful ability to shift gracefully between manic 16th-note hi-hat patterns and off-kilter beats that wouldn't be out of place on a Gang of Four album.



Romweber left Let's Active in 1984 but continued making music, recording multiple studio albums with the Stones–influenced North Carolina rockers Snatches of Pink (who also used the band name Clarissa for two releases) and performing/recording with her younger brother Dexter in the Dexter Romweber Duo.

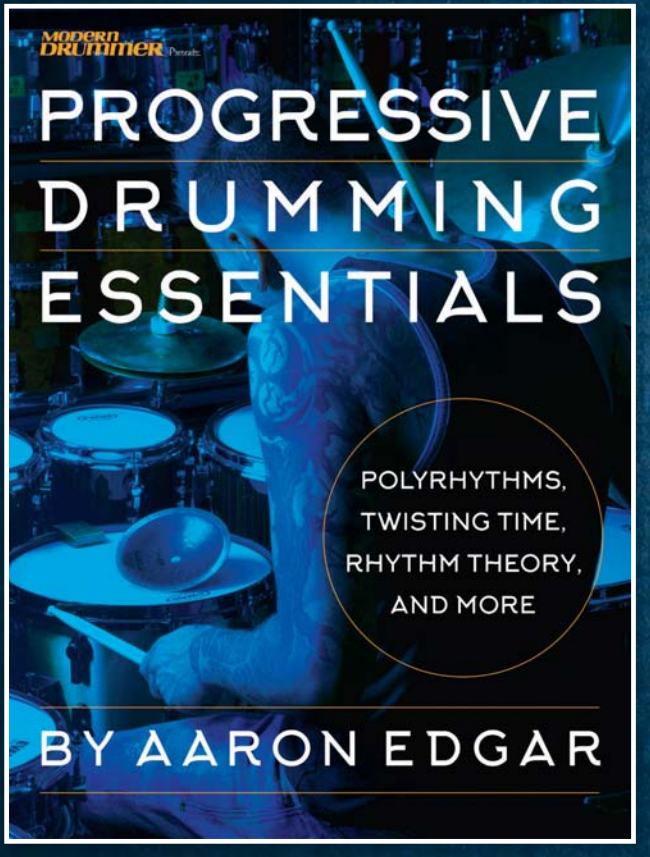
Romweber was an inspiration to and a champion for many young drummers during her life. Rob Ladd, who would go on to drum for Roger Daltrey, Don Henley, and Alanis Morissette, attended high school with Romweber. He cites her as a flashpoint for his musical ambitions. "She really was the catalyst for my professional life," says Ladd. "We'd cut school and talk about Stewart Copeland and XTC's Terry Chambers. The thing is, she could really play like them. Seeing her grow into a professional drummer like I wanted to be was huge in making me think, 'Hey, maybe I could do it, too.'"

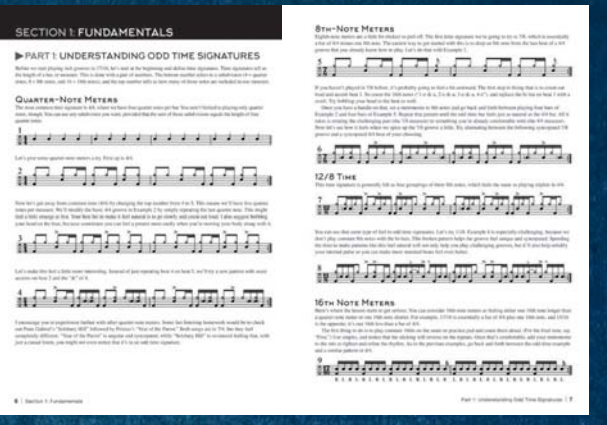
I'm one of the non-North Carolina natives whose life was touched by Romweber. We met in the fall of 1983 when Let's Active opened for R.E.M. at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. We became friends that night, and she'd go on to play a crucial role in my late teens by supporting my musical aspirations and exposing me to music that was outside of my wheelhouse. Without her encouragement, I don't know if I would've relocated from Philadelphia to North Carolina in 1986, a move that eventually led to my joining the Chapel Hill indie-rock band Superchunk.

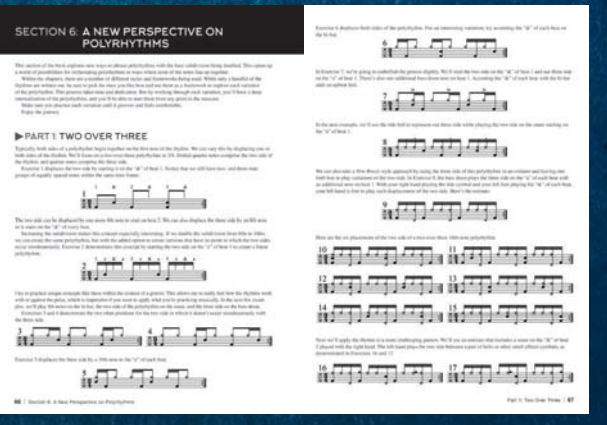
I was fortunate to be on hand for Romweber's final onstage appearance in August 2014, when she reunited with just Easter—original Let's Active bassist Faye Hunter had passed on in 2013. The two played Let's Active songs at a benefit concert at Chapel Hill's famed club Cat's Cradle. Though they hadn't performed together in decades, the magical guitar and drum interplay between them was in full effect. Romweber was a force, pounding out her iconic *Afoot* and *Cypress* beats as well as adding her unique take on several post-1984 Let's Active songs. "I had the great pleasure of playing with her again that night," says Easter. "And there it was—more than thirty years later—her truly distinctive sound in all its glory."

Though her time was much too brief, Romweber made an indelible mark as one of the most important drummers in the earliest days of modern alternative rock. Just as crucial, she will be remembered by those who knew her closely as a kindhearted friend who helped people achieve their best.

Play More PROG







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KIT OF THE MONTH

An Amazing Signia, and a Rush Tribute

"When I was in high school, there was a drummer that everyone looked up to," says Joe Bertram of Deerfield, Illinois. "And not just everyone who was into music, but all the kids. He could play anything and was self-taught. He was a real prodigy, if you will."

That drummer's name is Dave Picchietti, who currently resides in Lake Bluff, Illinois. Bertram explains that in high school Picchietti was in a Rush cover band, and he'd watch the drummer intensely to try to learn his secrets and the drum solo to the classic Rush song "YYZ."

Although Bertram lost touch with Picchietti over the years, he had heard that the drummer had an operation that left him in a wheelchair. "Luckily I reconnected with him about seven years ago," Bertram says. "And it was great! His condition leaves him slurring his speech and unable to walk without a cane or walker. But he still has that same zest for life."

Recently Picchietti had Bertram over to show his pride and joy: a beautiful cherry-red Signia kit in immaculate condition. When the drummer was setting the kit up with the help of his two sons, he noticed the screws inside the shells holding the lugs were rusted and oxidized. "He replaced every screw and washer inside that amazing set," says Bertram. "And the toms were all tuned pretty high. Dave asked me to help tweak the tuning, and as I brought the batter heads slowly down, they just started singing. It was great fun for me to get these drums sounding better for him. He had the kit's Tama gong bass drum special ordered to match the Signia, and the Paiste crotale by his hi-hat is tuned to the same note as the intro to 'YYZ,' of course!"

Photo Submission: Hi-res digital photos, along with descriptive text, may be emailed to kitofthemonth@moderndrummer.com. Show "Kit of the Month" in the subject line.

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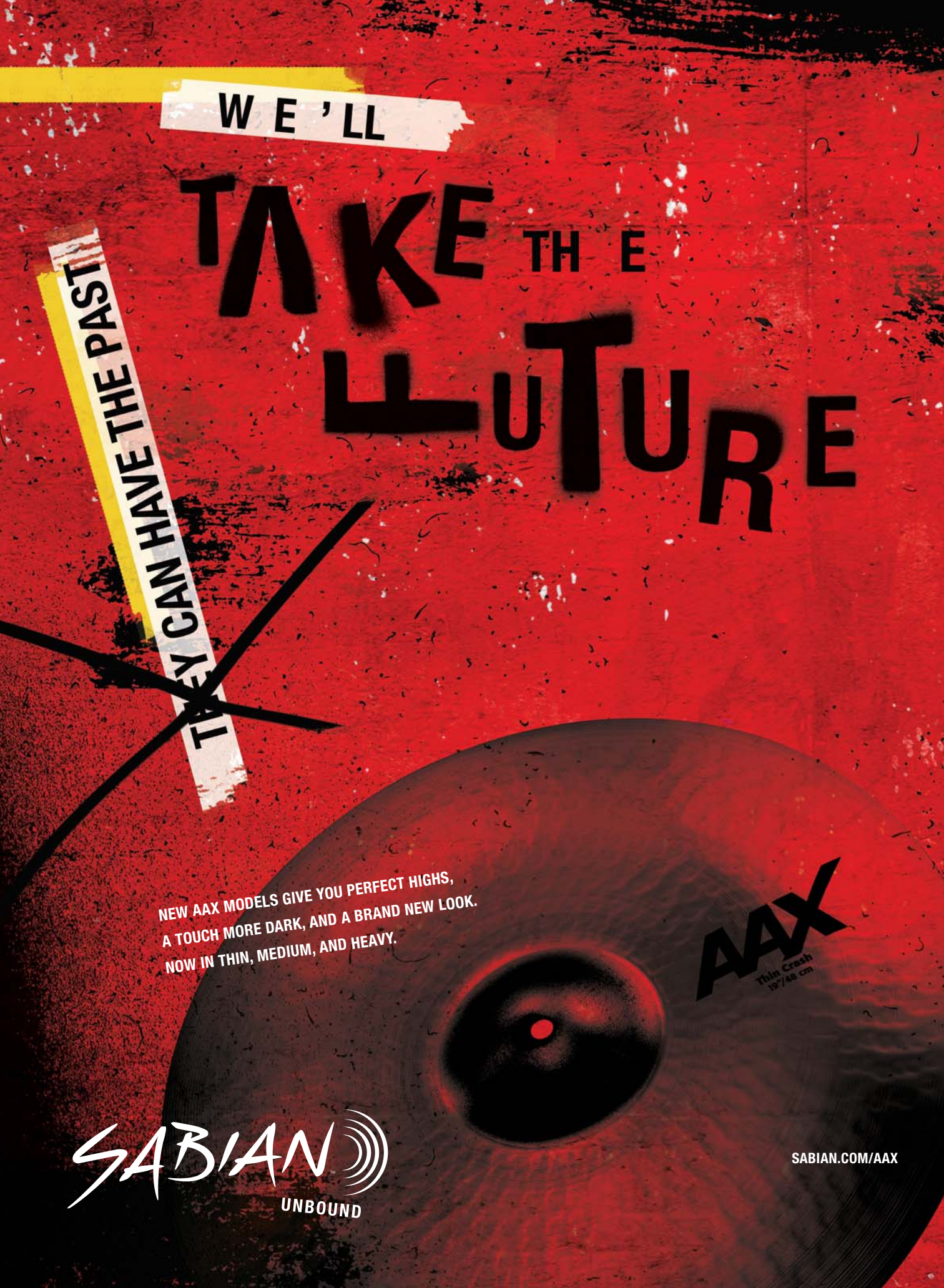
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